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"WHY, CHERRY," HE ASKS, AMAZED, "WHATEVER IS THE MATTER?"

CHERRY;

Or, A DAUGHTER OF THE SOUTH.

BY ARABELLA SOUTHWORTH.

CHAPTER I.

A SOUTHERN HOME.

EARLY morning in Virginia.

A landscape veiled in neutral-tinted haze. A large white house, with a tin roof, and a wide porch furnished with a table and chairs, and clambered over at one end by an aged honeysuckle, which seemed to grow sweeter-scented as the years went by.

This residence stood in the midst of a yard set round with locust and hickory trees, and across which a brick footpath led straight from the house to a gate that opened upon the

high road, one of the liveliest thoroughfares in the section.

Presently from within there came into the porch an elderly colored man in a white jacket and apron, who set about laying the cloth for breakfast, just as the green shutters of one of the five upper windows were flung open, and a bright beautiful face looked forth into the morning mist, which, however, was already assuming a semi-luminous appearance, and instant by instant becoming more transparent.

"Yes," said Cherry Baskerville to herself, as she took a cursory glance of the horizon; "as usual, it is going to be splendidly fine on my birthday! I am so glad! I should hate to have it cloudy or wet, and as dear grannie says—"

"Now do come 'long, honey, and be dressed," entreated a stout, mild-voiced colored woman approaching the window. "It am berry late, it am! Fac'! Jupe am setten out de breff'st in de—"

"Well, well, Mammy, be quick," cried the girl with a certain tone of good-natured brusqueness, as she faced round to the swarthy nurse of her infancy, who now acted as *femme de chambre*.

Although the young lady looked a mere child, and generally went by her old pet name of Baby, this was the fourteenth anniversary of her birth.

The sole offspring of an aristocratic and wealthy planter, her life had hitherto flown like a happy dream.

Motherless since she was three months old, she had been made an idol of both by her handsome father and his widowed mother who brought her up. My sweet little "pocket Venus," Mr. Baskerville, sometimes called his daughter by way of jest. A small "queen of hearts," would not have been a very exaggerated description of the girl's position, not only with the colored folks on the estate, but in the social circle where her family had always held a foremost place.

This June morning, while Cherry's toilet proceeds satisfactorily under the clumsy-looking but deft fingers of Mammy Eunice, the atmosphere goes on brightening. Like a mighty globe of crimson fire, the sun suddenly bounds above the horizon; a diamond gleam of brilliance slants across the bedroom floor, making the brass claw feet of the drawers glitter like gems; and, all at once, every tree in the yard seems to start alive with chirrup and twitter.

"Do make haste, Mammy!" cried the girl, waxing restive, as if in sympathy with the awakening of Nature outside. "Do make haste! How long you are fixing that tiresome sash!"

In spite, however, of "Missie's" fidgets, Eunice contrives to give the requisite finishing touches, till at length dress and ribbons are

declared "all right," and the shining curls in which the old negress takes such pride are arranged in a perfumed, flaxen shower, reaching below her darling's waist.

"Dar, go 'long now, honey," says Mammy, taking off and folding up her apron; "I'se done culled them riglets fuss-rate, I has. You am as lubly as Queen Sebar, I do declar'!"

Like a bird let loose, away flies Cherry down the wide, carpetless stairs; past her father's chamber-door; past her grandmother's; past the quaint antique clock, brought from England by an ancestor of bygone generations, and which holds up a curious pair of copper hands before its face, as if bashful.

On the threshold of the back door, which is open, sits an aged negress, smoking a long reed pipe, while keeping her eye upon some fifteen or twenty baby darkies, toddling, and tumbling, and sprawling about the yard as if thoroughly enjoying themselves.

"Good-morning, Aunt Nancy," says Cherry, half inclined for a few minutes' chat with the eighty-years-old woman, supposed by her congeners to understand "obi," and whose business is to take charge of the "pickaninies" while their parents are at work.

"Mornin', missie," answers Nancy, with a grin, but not removing the pipe from her mouth—"mornin', missie."

But whatever Miss Baskerville's conversational intentions might be, they were suddenly put a stop to by Jupiter's first clang of the breakfast-bell, which sent her quickly to the porch, where a dainty meal waited, and the great silver urn was bubbling and sputtering like a miniature geyser.

Presently the house-master appeared in his dressing-gown—a remarkably handsome man, and very youthful-looking to be the father of a daughter in her teens.

Shortly after him came his mother, a charming old lady dressed in lavender batiste, with a frilled muslin apron, having immense pockets and a "natty" little bib.

In one hand she carried a well-filled key-basket, in the other a sandal-wood fan; and her long, thick, silver hair was coiled Greek fashion round a still fine and graceful head.

"Many happy birthdays may you see, my precious!" she said, embracing Cherry, and presenting her with a small box, on opening which the girl's eyes danced with delight at the sight of her first pair of earrings—tiny golden circlets set with turquoise.

With a loving kiss, Mr. Baskerville next made his gift, of an exquisite small watch, enameled in myrtle green, and studded with diamond sparks.

"Oh, papa! oh, grannie!" ejaculated Cherry, nearly speechless with joy. "How good you are!"

"I am so glad you like your trinkets, my

pet!" said Mr. Baskerville, in his fascinating, half-languid, half-jocular way. "Come, let us see how you look in your finery. Magnificent! I declare I shall never again have the courage to address such an elegant individual as Baby! Miss Baskerville—madam—may I be permitted to offer you a seat and some breakfast?"

They were a merry trio; and very delightful it was, sitting in the flower-scented porch with hot coffee before them, and cool dew-berries, and turkey hash, and fried egg-plant, and ever so many kinds of bread, besides the frittery batter-cakes, for which the cook was so famous, that her master generally named them "Aunt Sally's peculiar."

Grandmamma filled the cups and fanned herself, while her son helped the hash, and with a glance over his shoulder at the thermometer, predicted an uncommonly hot day.

"Hallo! who have we here?" he cried, presently, as, table-napkin in hand, and on hospitable thoughts intent, he hurried to the gate, where a covered buggy was drawing up.

"Dennison, by all that's wonderful!" he exclaims, joyfully, as a stoutish gentleman gets out, followed by a tall, slender lad. "My dear fellow, what blessed wind has blown you south once more? I am so glad to see you! Is this your son? Very pleased indeed to make his acquaintance! Come away to breakfast! Lucky it is ready, for you must both be famishing if you have driven all the way from Farmville."

Leaving the carriage in the hands of a negro groom, the two gentlemen proceeded, arm-in-arm, up the footpath, the youth coming after, and looking around with earnest gray eyes, which in some lights appeared dark blue.

Mrs. Baskerville welcomed the strangers cordially, while the host nearly drove Uncle Jupiter frantic by ordering this, that and the other dainty dish before Aunt Sally could possibly find time to cook them.

By-and-by, when they had all drawn in their chairs and were busily engaged at table, Cherry—under the shelter, so to speak, of the grandmaternal wing—took note of the newcomers, and gathered from the general conversation that Doctor Dennison was a physician in New York, a relative of her mother, and had recently lost his wife; also, that Edgar, their only child, was seventeen, and in delicate health, for which latter reason the popular doctor was now using his own short holiday to give him a trip to the sunny South.

The reverse of stupid, but in many respects rather childish for her age, it was with a curious mixture of admiration and awe that Cherry viewed the tall, slim youth, who appeared so dignified she could hardly believe him only three years her senior.

"Why," she thought, "Peyton Enderby is eighteen, yet I sometimes tease him awfully, and play him tricks whenever I get a chance; but one could hardly venture to use such liberties with Master Dennison—yet, I'm not sure either."

"Suffers from his chest, does he?" said the planter to Doctor Dennison. "Well, our climate here is the very thing for that, so take my advice and leave him with us for a month or two. My mother is a capital nurse, and I'll find him a safe horse to ride with my little girl, who is a first-rate equestrienne—aren't you, Baby? Well, Edgar, what do you say to the suggestion?"

After some amicable discussion, it was at length settled that the invalid should remain a few weeks at Baskerville, a decision which so strongly excited the juvenile heiress that it seemed doubtful whether her emotions would find vent in laughter or tears.

CHAPTER II.

THE YANKEE COUSIN.

THE climate of Virginia suited Edgar so well that his stay was protracted indefinitely.

"Health is the first consideration, my dear boy," wrote Doctor Dennison; "but I can depend upon you keeping up your studies so far as not to be behind the average when you enter Harvard University."

To the physician, who doted upon his clever son, and had anticipated for him a brilliant college career, it was a trial to have the lad lying, as it were, upon his oars for months together; although, judging from his letters, nothing could be pleasanter or more innocently happy than the life he was leading.

With Edgar's intellectual bias and thoughtful nature, he was not likely to fritter away his time; but to one reared in a rather exclusive, stiff, Knickerbocker circle, there was something seductively captivating in the take-it-easy yet refined tone of Southern society. With the sublime self-conceit of youth, he possessed infallible opinions upon various subjects—slavery among the rest; but like a good many other folks, found that the "peculiar institution," although of course wrong in the abstract, did not appear at all diabolical when viewed from under the roof-tree of a kindly planter's family in its midst.

At the period of the young fellow's visit to Baskerville House, the War of Secession was as yet undreamed of; and cousins located above Mason and Dixon's line still interchanged the courtesies of kinship with those settled below it.

Edgar's advent in the South was an era in Cherry Baskerville's existence.

"I used to fancy I had good times before he came," she occasionally soliloquized; "but now

it seems as if I never could have been quite happy."

As a matter of course, the two were almost constantly together, although if love were the attractive power, it was apparently upon the principle of the old Scottish axiom that "nipping and scarting are equivalent to wooing."

Well informed for his years, and slightly pragmatical, the young fellow was shocked at the comparative ignorance of his pretty companion, and was honestly desirous of bringing her up to his ideal female level; whereas she candidly confessed that in her opinion the most delightful thing imaginable would be never to open a book from year's end to year's end.

"But, Cherry, it is your duty to read and cultivate your mind," he would say.

"There you go again, with your 'duty, duty,' just as if you were an ugly old man and I had gray hair and a hump!"

"But to oblige me, you will surely read these two short pages, will you not?"

"Well, perhaps; only for this once, though, you saucy boy!" she answered, with a charming smile, and a glance which sets the youthful pedagogue's pulses dancing wildly.

Grandmamma Baskerville, or "Ole Miss," as the niggers called her, had been the girl's only governess. Her father could not bear the idea of parting with her, so instead of going to school at Richmond or Baltimore, she was educated at home, acquiring at second-hand the old lady's accomplishments, which included a smattering of French, history, and politics, with graceful manners and a decidedly aristocratic deportment. It was no fault of dear Ole Miss that music was not first in the list of her grandchild's acquirements. She herself had been reckoned a brilliant pianist in her day, but what could one make of a pupil who insisted that it was no use bothering about sharps and flats, as they were so much alike she could never tell the difference, especially in hot weather?

On horseback, however, Cherry was in her glory, and the two young people rode out a good deal in the delicious freshness of early dawn and before supper in the cool eventide, when tired nature seemed resting after the burning heat of the day, and the soft pathetic notes of the whippowil sounded sweetly from the groves.

Their constant association was, meanwhile, telling upon the characters of both.

With returning health, Edgar's harmless little pedantries and dogmatisms gradually disappeared; although, perhaps, the real cause of this change was not altogether the renewed bodily energy to which it was partly attributed by his amused host and hostess.

Not only for his father's sake, but his own, they were very fond of him, and quite agreed with "the neighborhood" that when he had

done growing he would be a noble, gallant-looking man. Cherry also was different from her former self; but it would be impossible to say in what the alteration consisted. As sweetly piquante as ever, she was now and then conscious of a vague sense of tender sadness, and would sometimes give a little involuntary sigh without any reason. Having all her days been accustomed to have love lavished upon her from every quarter, she took it as a matter of course, but was by nature of an extremely affectionate disposition.

The Baskervilles' nearest neighbors were Mr. and Mrs. Enderby, of The Oaks, and as their little girl was but twelve months older than Cherry, while Peyton—the younger son—was only three years her senior, the three were more like sisters and brother than anything else.

Peyton, a big, strong, good-natured, manly sort of boy, had always been accustomed to call Cherry "his little wife"; sometimes by way of teasing her, sometimes "just for fun" and for many a long day to address her as Mrs. P. had been a standing joke in both families. He was very fond of the girl, and thought her prettier and prettier every time he came home from the State University, where he was being educated, and a distant view of which might be seen from a queerly-shaped little timber tower at the west corner of The Oaks mansion house.

Without being exactly antagonistic, he felt decidedly riled by the cool manner in which her "Yankee cousin" monopolized his own cherished playfellow or plaything; while, on the other hand, if ever young Dennison was tempted to remount his discarded "stilts," it was when, with her finger on her rosy lips, "little Mrs. P." would slip behind his rival's chair, clasp her hands over his eyes, and, with her flower-like face on his shoulder, bid him "guess who it was."

CHAPTER III.

A FIRST SORROW.

TEN o'clock in the forenoon, a cloudless sky, and the sun shining as only in Virginia can he pour down the fierceness of his brilliancy.

Ole Miss having given out the daily rations, etc., etc., and looked in at those cabins where there are sick folks, is seated in the porch, chatting with Cherry and Edgar, all fanning themselves vigorously, and sipping the iced-water which stands at hand in a brass-hooped bucket.

By and by, as the sun climbs higher in the heavens, the three drop asleep.

At one P.M. the bell calls them to dinner, after which the old lady and her grandchildren retire for a *siesta*, while Edgar indulges his

musical aspirations by strumming with one finger on the piano.

Company was expected that evening—the three Misses Hawksley and their brother, whom Mr. Baskerville had met shortly before at the Sulphur Springs. Their home was fourteen miles away, in Charlotte county; and although Cherry's father had bought "Jupiter" of Mr. Hawksley, it was only within the last few weeks he had become personally acquainted with the family, who were also strangers to his mother.

Out in the cook-house Aunt Sally was plying her vocation, and across the yard the rich smells of stews and bakes and fries floated, mingling curiously with the sweet odor of a crimson damask rose-bush, planted years ago by Frank Baskerville's late wife the day he brought her home a loved and loving bride.

Instead of lolling with his pipe, as usual, in the shade, the handsome planter seemed possessed with what ladies term "the fidgets," and finally roused poor Ole Miss from a "snooze" in her rocker to ask about the arrangements for supper.

The dear lady's temper was well known to be nearly perfect for mildness and patience, but on the present occasion she answered as sharply as if her tongue were the "business end" of a wasp.

"Of course, Frank," she said, "I always *do* have things properly fixed; you are quite aware of that; but really, to make a fuss about such people as those Hawksleys is rather too much of a good thing. It is an open secret that the old man will 'burst up' before long, and the grandfather of the present family was a common laborer when he landed in America!"

"Stuff and nonsense, mother! Who says Hawksley is hard up?"

"Everybody."

"Then everybody is wrong. His place over in Charlotte is one of the largest in the county, and on which in most seasons he raises fully five thousand hills of tobacco."

"You appear remarkably well acquainted with his affairs."

"Not I, mother; only as they were so *civil* at the Springs, I could not do less than ~~offer~~ them quarters for the single night they can remain. They are on their way to visit a cousin in Cumberland. Miss Portia, the eldest daughter, has just returned from Savannah, where she has been with a married sister the last two years."

"Portia! Goodness gracious, Frank, I have often heard about her! She is the one who jilted Digby Thornton so shamefully. The poor fellow has never since had a day to do well, and is killing himself with drink. Well might the horrid woman be thankful to hide away in Savannah or anywhere else!"

In the afternoon everybody made a company toilet.

As the hour when the guests were expected drew near, the host and hostess with Cherry and Edgar, sat awaiting them in the porch. The sun was setting gloriously in a perfect blaze of ruby, and amber, and opal; straggling files of field-hands returning from their daily labor crossed the road a little way off and made for their quarters in the back-yard, ha-haing merrily, and shouldering their hoes like muskets.

Traffic and the solar rays had covered the highway with soft, ruddy, powdered clay a quarter of a yard deep, which so completely deadened sound, that the party in the porch saw, instead of hearing, the approach of a heavy carriage, drawn by a pair of splendid horses, which pawed and tossed their manes when pulled up short, as if ready for a fresh start.

Mr. Baskerville looked radiant as he flew to the gate to hand out the ladies, two of whom were pink-and-white, flaxen-haired, and blue-eyed, with nothing distinctive about them. The third and eldest, who came last, was tall, slender, and sallow, with not a good feature in her face, but a pair of eyes so large, dark, and lustrous, that they seemed to cast a glow over the whole countenance.

The gentleman who accompanied them was their brother, Mr. Wingfield Hawksley, a well-got-up "clothes-peg."

After shaking hands, they hurried up-stairs to be "arranged" by their colored woman; but whereas the china-doll-looking sisters returned fresh and neat in a few minutes, it was nearly half an hour before Miss Portia made her appearance in black lace over satin, which was very becoming, only the hostess felt provoked at observing her hair and corsage adorned with some rare scarlet geraniums, which had been placed in a vase to bedeck the mantelshelf of the guest-chamber.

In the basement everything was *en grande tenue*; the huge silver ice-pitcher shining like a mirror, a beautiful bouquet of flowers in each table-napkin, and four females with yellow bandanas round their woolly pates waving immense fans of peacock's feathers to keep off the flies.

The Hawksleys seemed anything but a silent family; and Miss Portia's remarks, if occasionally *risques*, were so amusing, that the host sat in a continual state of merriment, and looked as pleased as a "duck at a June bug."

Even Edgar appeared so carried away with her racy anecdotes, that Cherry felt herself neglected, and instead of returning to the porch with the others after supper, retired to the garden in a huff.

On her way thither, passing the open door of the weaving-house, she was startled at hearing Mammy Eunice say to somebody inside:

"Yas, dat 'zackly what 'er done told me—our Massa Frank gwine marry Miss Possi. Fac's death!"

"Glory to gracious! What Ole Miss say?"

"Dunno, but am fac', it am!"

In an agony of jealous grief, Cherry fled, and wept her first bitter tears in the green bower at the bottom of the garden-walk.

As she sat moaning, with her poor little flushed face in her hands, footsteps drew near.

It was Edgar coming through the purple dusk.

"Cherry," he cried—"little Cherry, where have you hidden yourself?"

Directed to the bower by a gulping, sobbing sound, he found the trembling child, who held away her tear-stained countenance for very shame of its bleared condition.

"Why, Cherry," he asks, amazed, "what ever is the matter?"

Weeping, she tries to explain her cruel grief.

He folds her in his arms, calls her a "dear little goose;" and then, with a strange, far-off look in his eyes, says solemnly, "Listen, dear. Even if what you dread happens, and your father should marry Miss Portia, to me—at least, you will always be dearer than anybody else in the world!"

By-and-by, when she is soothed, the two young creatures return home, hand-in-hand, like the babes in the wood. Nor does the girl feel utterly woe-begone, although the first thing she sees is her father and Miss Portia promenading slowly up and down the front yard.

CHAPTER IV.

SUDDEN PARTING.

ABOUT six weeks after Christmas, Frank Baskerville proposed to Miss Hawksley, and was accepted.

He had been from home for a day or two, came back in high spirits, and after kissing his mother and daughter, blurted out nervously that Portia had promised to be his wife.

Thereupon the old lady flung up her pretty soft white hands, gave a little dismayed cry, and, bursting into tears, exclaimed: "Oh, Frank! how could you dream of such a thing as giving poor darling Cherry that odious woman as a step-mother? She's a perfect fright—quite as old as you—as yellow as a duck's foot, a shameless flirt, and has a tongue as long as from here to Washington! You will be miserable—I know it—but you'll only have yourself to blame! Oh, oh, oh! Haven't I always made your home happy and comfortable? And now, at my time of life, to be turned upon the wide world is very, very hard! I shall go to Lynchburg to Cousin Martha. She will,

perhaps, give me a shelter for—for the short time I am likely to live!"

The planter's eyes filled.

"Mother," he said, "do listen to reason! The marriage is bound to take place, but it will nearly break my heart if you do not continue to make this your home! For my sake, dear mother, won't you try to like Portia?"

And with that, down he dropped on his knees at his mother's feet, kissing the old lady's hand again and again, although she endeavored to withdraw it to wipe away the tears that trickled down her cheeks.

At length, with many embraces, and no little pain on both sides, it was settled that Mrs. Baskerville should continue to take the entire charge of her granddaughter, but have nothing more to do with housekeeping, although Frank begged she would consider the place, and all belonging to it, as much her own as during his father's lifetime. To be obliged to enter into these arrangements with his mother, made him wince. Like all old-time Virginian ladies, she piqued herself upon her powers of domestic administration; and he well knew that to cease from being a sort of "queen regnant" in the front yard, and back yard, as well as the great house, would be a very hard pill indeed to swallow.

The wedding, however, was not to take place till the "merrie month of May," so, although it was rarely out of her grandmother's mind, Cherry tried to enjoy the present without looking forward to the evil day.

But laugh we or moan we, time hurries on apace. Spring seemed hardly begun when it was past; and in another fortnight the planter, who had been all in all to his mother and child, would have sworn at the altar to love and cherish Portia.

Cherry was, *nolens volens*, to be one of the six bridesmaids, in conjunction with five of the Miss Hawksleys; and she would have been better pleased with the pretty white dress which arrived from a fashionable *modiste* at Richmond, if, by chance, "dear grand-mamma" had not discovered that her son had given his sisters-in-law elect *carte blanche* to provide bridal raiment for themselves. But in this world there is no condition so sad it might not be worse; and before the arrival of the event to which Cherry looked forward as the beginning of misery, the pain of her anticipations was nearly neutralized by an infinitely greater calamity; for Edgar's health being now quite restored, his father wrote to say he should kill two birds with one stone, by taking him home to New York when he came to officiate as groomsman to his old friend Baskerville.

Of course the girl did not expect that he would stay permanently "down South;" but with the hopefulness of early youth had kept

trusting that something or other might turn up to defer his departure for months at the least. She felt cold and faint for a minute when the letter was read aloud; but whereas she formerly would have openly bewailed the loss of her companion, a curious sort of self-consciousness now held her silent.

As for the young fellow himself, with a sudden half-regretful sense that he would never be a boy any more, and an instantaneous bound, so to speak, into manhood, he retired to his own room, in such a nervous condition that he had to fling himself upon the bed.

The greatness of his love for Cherry swept through him like a revelation, making him redden to the roots of his hair, and causing his heart to throb till he could hardly breathe.

Did she love him in the same way?

She was not quite fifteen, while he wanted five weeks of seventeen; but would it be prudent to depart without asking her to marry him when they were old enough?—especially as Peyton Enderby would be left in possession of the field! Would her father and his own laugh at the idea of a lad proposing for a wife before going up to the university? How would dear, beautiful, childish-looking Cherry receive his declaration?

She was the heiress of a large estate, but that did not enter his calculations; and if it had, was not he the only son and heir of a wealthy physician?

A strange new sensation of shyness came over him as he got up and prepared to rejoin Mrs. Baskerville and her granddaughter in the drawing-room.

But imagine the lad's amazement on looking out at the front door, *en passant*, to see his father and Frank Baskerville coming arm-in-arm from the gate, where a carriage was waiting.

In "Ole Virginny," at the time of which we are speaking, the post was not, as an institution, conducted either with the rapidity of greased lightning or the regularity of a patent chronometer, and Doctor Dennison's epistle having been delayed a couple of days *in transitu*, circumstances had meanwhile occurred which rendered it desirable the writer should put in an appearance as soon as possible; so here he was, hardly half an hour later than the letter which was creating such a commotion in two youthful souls.

In order to catch a particular return train to New York, it was necessary to limit his stay to one hour and a half, and he was sincere in his expressions of regret not only at carrying off Edgar so unexpectedly, but also for being deprived of the anticipated pleasure of assisting at his friend's wedding. The case was this.

A great medical congress was about to take place in Paris, and as Doctor Dennison was

supposed to have discovered an entirely new mode of treatment of pneumonia, his professional brethren requested him to represent them at the meeting. It was a high compliment, and as a reliable friend professed himself willing to attend his patients during the weeks he would be absent, the physician was in capital spirits at the prospect before him.

But it was chiefly on his son's account he had made this hurried journey to the South. Should his chest prove as well as he hoped, a voyage would be the best thing to brace him up before beginning his studies at Harvard.

Attributing Edgar's extreme pallor, silence, and almost stern expression to natural grief at quitting his kind friends and pretty little playmate, the doctor was very tender with the motherless boy, whom, in spite of his five feet seven inches of extremely slim longitude, he still viewed as a mere child.

Time seemed to fly doubly quick that forenoon. There was so much to do in the hour and a half.

Plenty of eager hands were waiting to pack Massa Eggar's boxes, but in order to be left alone in his chamber, he insisted upon doing it himself.

Cherry wandered about like a perturbed spirit, in a pitiable state of nervousness, her hands trembling, her eyes hot, her cheeks in a flame. She was horrified at herself for not lavishing kindness upon Edgar, but felt too shy. Their constant companionship of the last blessed months seemed now but the dream of a dream, and already she felt as if the youth were almost a stranger.

At length the doctor announced that time was up.

"I am sorry not to see you 'turned off,' Frank," he said cheerily to the planter as they walked together to the gate; "but I dare say you will easily find a substitute. Oh! by the way, I was very nearly forgetting to give you this trifle for Miss Hawksley. I intended presenting it personally on the happy day; but please give it, with my sincere wishes for your mutual happiness."

"Thanks, old friend!" answered the other, as he placed the tiny packet in his pocket. "I am sure she will value anything from you; but I wish you could have been with us," answered the bridegroom, who appeared as gayly buoyant as a man in that condition is generally expected to be.

The negroes on the Baskerville estate being well treated, took great interest in the family, friends, and doings, and quite a little crowd of darkies hung about to see "Massa Eggar and him fadder go Norf."

A few steps behind the two gentlemen, Mrs. Baskerville advances slowly up the brick footpath, with Cherry and Edgar.

The girl's heart seems one minute to thud

like a steam-engine, and the next to die away entirely.

Aunt Dinah, Aunt Sally, Mammy Eunice, nearly everybody who is not "out at the tobacco" is present, hanging round to wish the travelers good-speed.

Edgar's boxes are lifted in.

"Now, my boy," says his father, "jump up at once; it will take us every minute of our time to catch the train."

At this moment a stable-boy, to whom Edgar had showed some little kindnesses, appears, hurrying up with a great wicker cage containing a mocking-bird.

"Fo' yo', please, Massa Edgar; done catch him myself," he says, as the bird begins mew-ing like a kitten and then gives an admirable imitation of the argumentative notes of the katydid.

"Thank you, Sundy," falters young Dennison, hardly able to restrain his tears.

The cage is speedily placed on the top of the buggy.

"Now, Edgar, look sharp!" cried his father, shaking hands cordially with Ole Miss and the planter.

The two juvenile lovers feel as if the solid earth were giving way beneath their feet. Neither can speak, so amid reiterated adjurations to "make haste," they clutch each other with a despairing sort of hug, kiss hurriedly, and part.

"How do you think Harry Enderby would do instead of Dennison?" said Mr. Baskerville to his mother, as they sauntered back to the porch after seeing the travelers off. "He is perhaps rather young; but there is now so little time for arranging."

"I dare say he will be suitable enough; but won't the Miss Hawksleys be rather taken aback when poor dear Harry appears instead of the grand New York physician they have been expecting?"

"What is this, I wonder, mother?" remarked Baskerville, ignoring the last little hint, and opening the doctor's parcel, a small cedar box, lined with white velvet.

"Oh, how exquisite!" exclaimed the old lady and Cherry at the sight of a massive plain gold bracelet, clasped with an excellent likeness of the bridegroom, finely painted on ivory.

"Very handsome, indeed!" he said. "Is it like? She'll be glad to have it, I know. When shall we be giving bridal gifts to you, little one?" he added, stroking his daughter's hair kindly, but next moment calling to one of the men:

"Hey, Sam! Saddle Sultan and bring him round directly!"

A bitter cry of indignation rises from the girl's heart.

"I am nobody to papa now!" she thinks, feeling as if he had struck her.

"My poor, precious, forsaken little darling!" sobs the old lady, drawing her onto her lap when they were safely indoors.

With her face upon her dear grannie's plump, shapely shoulder, over which Cherry's flaxen ringlets flow plentifully, the girl clasps her round the neck, and they weep in concert, till after the storm comparative calm ensues from sheer exhaustion.

CHAPTER V.

HARD TO BEAR.

"YES, I expect she is sickening for measles," said Doctor Randolph, with his finger and thumb on Cherry's wrist. "There's an 'epidemic' of it about at present, but mostly of a mild type. Cannot yet decide positively what it is that ails her, but I suspect it is measles. To-morrow will show. Meantime, give her fifteen drops of this tincture in water every three hours. I shall be here early. Got some headache, missy, and a singing in your ears?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ab! I thought so. Now you must lie quiet, like a good child, and do not attempt to get up to-day."

"Should I put off my marriage, doctor?" asked Mr. Baskerville. "The ceremony is fixed for eight to-morrow morning, to let us be in time for the Richmond train. We were all to have gone to Blue Ridge this afternoon; but if there's the slightest danger—"

"Pooh, pooh! Nothing of the sort, my dear sir! This may not even be measles. Delay the happy day? No, no; take an old man's advice, and make hay while the sun shines. I'm sorry to say, though, that we must disappoint our young friend here. She cannot go, that's certain. But cheer up, missie! your time will come by and by."

Ever since the Dennisons left, Cherry had felt poorly, though not so much so as to suggest the necessity for calling in medical assistance till that morning, when she had fainted in Mammy Eunice's arms while being dressed. Terribly alarmed, Mr. Baskerville had galloped away to fetch the family doctor; but now that apparently no danger was to be apprehended, he wanted his mother to fulfill her engagement, and accompany him to the home of his bride.

"I am more than sorry to disappoint you, my dear Frank," said the old lady; "but to leave Cherry ill in bed is impossible."

"But only consider," he urged, "how strange it will look for you not to be there, when Randolph declares there's nothing serious with Baby! The Hawksleys will naturally think you intend to slight them; and then, such a talk it will make all over the county! Do come, mother! Rather than you shouldn't, I

shall send back the new carriage with you the minute we are married, although Portia has set her heart upon driving in it to the railway depot."

"No, no, Frank! I am very sorry, but when I see my duty, there's no use saying another word. I'm sure you might have known that by this time."

Dear Ole Miss was, perhaps, not quite disconsolate at the chance of staying at home; but she had decided wisely, for, to her experienced eye, Cherry seemed worse than Doctor Randolph was aware of.

At three P. M., when the bridegroom departed for Blue Ridge, he gently kissed the sufferer's burning brow; but as he told her of the pretty presents he should bring back with him, she instinctively shut her eyes to hide the tears of mortification which threatened to overflow. That the father who had always so loved and petted her should not only go away to enjoy himself when she was ill, but be callous enough to try to tempt her grandmother also to leave her alone on her sick-bed was simply monstrous. After he drove off the old lady unconsciously raised herself still higher in the invalid's esteem by indulging at her bedside in what people thereabouts were wont to term "a hearty crying-spell."

As night drew on, Cherry became so restless and feverish that Eunice sat up with her; for that matter Ole Miss might as well not have gone to bed either, for hardly a quarter of an hour passed that she did not come tiptoe into the sick-room, in her dressing-gown and slippers, with a glass-shaded candle in her hand, and heavy care in her heart—she whom first a good husband, and then a heretofore dutiful son, had shielded from every possible annoyance. In her inmost soul, poor old lady, she refused even now to consider Frank undutiful, but the well-known proverb stuck in her throat—

"My son is my son till he gets a wife;
But my daughter's my daughter all my life."

The truth of this axiom she had never before experienced. Cherry's mother, the orphan child of a dear friend of her own, had lived such a short time after her marriage and been such a sweet, loving, gentle daughter that Frank himself scarcely mourned her loss more than Mrs. Baskerville did.

When Doctor Randolph came he looked concerned and changed the patient's medicine, saying he should return in the evening.

Having heard that she was not very well, Mrs. Enderby and Peyton rode over before supper to inquire after Cherry.

The very sight of such sympathetic friends did the girl good, and when she wanted a drink Peyton made haste to give it.

The tall, muscular, bright lad was a capital

nurse, and holding a glass of tamarinds and water to Cherry's lips he now, in order to make her smile by referring to the old family joke, said merrily—

"Of course I must see
That little Mrs. P.
Has tam'rinds and water,
Since she mayn't get tea."

As much to her own surprise as his, the answer to this *jeu d'esprit* was a flood of tears.

All at once a helpless sort of longing for Edgar had come over her. She knew how foolish it made her appear, but she could not leave off sobbing.

"Poor little Cherry!" says her grandmother, soothingly. "She is mighty sick!"

"Come, come, wifekins, don't take on like that!" says Peyton. "You'll be all right soon. I'll bring over the picture I promised you, to-morrow."

"Good-night, dear wee pet!" said gentle Mrs. Enderby. "I hope you will soon be better, and able to come and spend a long day with Bessie."

They departed, and with them Cherry's sentimental attack, the suddenness and violence of which was a puzzle to the girl herself.

When the doctor returned, the patient, without being specifically told, discovered, from the half-whispers of her grandmother and Eunice, that she had small-pox, that supremely dreaded but almost unknown disease in Virginia. How she could have caught it was a mystery; unless, indeed, Doctor Denison had brought the infection with him.

At Mrs. Baskerville's earnest entreaty, the family doctor remained all night to watch Cherry, and arrange how, if possible, to prevent the malady from spreading.

"My dear madam," he said to the old lady, "you and Mammy must attend to her yourselves, and on no account permit any communication between your cabins and the sick-room. When niggers get anything infectious, it is perfectly ruinous; they have not the sense to use ordinary precautions, and die off like rotten sheep. Missy's case is, however, quite a trifling one, I expect."

But before morning the patient was delirious; rushing, in imagination, through burning tobacco-fields, where all the plants were alight in huge crystal pipes, set upright in a soil of red-hot charcoal; or she would fancy it was the summer night, when Edgar joined her in the garden bower. But anon, poor child! the fantastic scene changed once more, and in pain and terror she was hurrying along amid blazing maize.

One evening the invalid awakes from what seems a dreamless sleep, feeling, ah! so very weak. The shutters are hooked back, and a fresh breeze comes through the open window.

The bell of a cow, which has strayed into the peach-orchard, tolls irregularly; the nearly level sun floods the wardrobe, drawers, and patchwork counterpane with saffron light, and gold-bronzes the head and shoulders of a man, stooping, with his back to the bed.

Too feeble to take a second look, or even wonder who he is, Cherry closes her eyes, which seem the most sentient parts of her frame, for they ache acutely as the cool air blows over them.

Just as she is once more falling asleep, the man, sneezing, startles her to utter an almost inaudible "Oh!" whereat he rises and steps quickly to the bed, with a bowl in his hand.

It is Peyton Enderby.

Bending over her, and gazing into her eyes, "Do you know me, Cherry?" he asks.

"Yes, Peyton."

"Thank goodness! But we mustn't let this stuff cool."

And with that he begins pouring spoonful after spoonful of melted lard upon his old playfellow's face, or, rather, the linen mask with which it is covered.

The oily warmth is comforting; but while the unction is in progress poor Ole Miss slips into the room, looking ten years older than she did a fortnight ago.

Without ceasing his grateful lubrications, Peyton exclaims:

"All right! She is herself again, Mrs. Baskerville," and presently Eunice joins the party.

From her quaint ejaculations Cherry learns that, in order to save her from being pitted, hot lard has been poured upon her face every half-hour by night and by day.

Peyton soon goes away, and then grand-mamma, her voice tremulous with excitement, tells how good he has been in their trouble.

"Dear boy, seeing what helpless old creatures I and Mammy were, he insisted upon taking turn-about with us in 'cosmetizing' you, as he calls it. At first I refused to permit this, but he declared that having once breathed the air of the sick-room, he ran no additional risk by continuing to do so. Doctor Randolph partly agreed with him, so, putting plenty of camphor about his person, here he has been almost constantly at his post. Heaven only knows what I should have done without him, I am so terribly nervous! He has written all my letters, too, Heaven bless him!"

Next morning Cherry was pronounced out of danger, although even yet not very far from that unknown land whose shores she had approached so near the last few days.

When not asleep she passed most of the time in a rather pleasant sort of drowse, drifting, drifting along, gliding, gliding, without troubling her head much about anything.

Did Edgar know of her illness? Why was her father absent? Should she be marked and disfigured for life? These and similar queries passed before her like the slides of a magic-lantern, but she did not feel as if they were of the least consequence.

One night her favorite kitten crept upon the bed and lay purring at her feet. A storm was brewing, and since sundown the wind had veered about from southwest to north. The air grew so chilly that Mrs. Baskerville placed an additional quilt over Cherry's bed at the moment when Mammy Eunice, catching up the kitten, rushed from the chamber.

Presently loud caterwaulings were heard outside, and, in a few minutes, back came Eunice in a state of exceeding elation.

"Yas," she cried, "I'se done done it! No rumaty pains gwine kill little Missie Cherry now! Blow souf dreckly, you'll see!"

"What on earth are you saying Mammy?" asks Mrs. Baskerville.

"Turned de wind right round, madam, dat's what I'se done done. Made de kitten claw de hickory tree; draw'd her up by de tail! Dat's what will allays turn de wind! 'Allelujah, amen!"

Mr. Baskerville had been written to twice, but no answer having come, it was supposed he had started with his bride for Savannah before the arrival of either of the letters from his mother. A note had come for the planter from Doctor Dennison, written just before sailing for Europe, and also a letter from Edgar to Cherry.

It was the first she had ever received; but surely no sheet of blue-ruled paper was ever set such store by. It lay under her head, and every now and then Peyton had to read it aloud, date, address, and all.

When the kindly young fellow, after shaking up her pillows, would ask with a smile, "Well, is that easier, Mrs. P.?" the reply would be, "Yes, thank you, dear Peyton; but do look if my letter is safe."

As she is not allowed to have a hand-glass to see her face, she imagines, in a listless sort of way, she is covered with small-pox marks.

Occasionally, too, it passes through her mind, "Would Edgar have behaved as dutifully as Peyton?"

So the days go by.

Sunday night.

Cherry's face is mending fast, but itching so that she cannot rest.

Outside it is pitch dark, and airless.

The tree-frogs seem to be holding a grand caucus, and an ancient owl, that lives in the hickory beside the cook-house, is screeching more dismally than usual.

In the invalid's room her grandmother is asleep upon a lounge. Peyton Enderby, seated

on one chair, with his feet upon the back of another, keeps his eye upon a spirit-lamp on the hearth, where Cherry's cosmetic is simmering.

A fire-fly sails in at the window, and after sundry gyrations, settles on his head like a star.

Suddenly noises are heard outside in the darkness—creakings, shaking of horses' bits, then a slamming of doors, and Mr. Baskerville's voice asking, eagerly, "How is she?" While the old lady—only half awake—is rubbing her eyes, he rushes in, and if Peyton had not held him back, would have clasped his daughter in his arms, in spite of her hideous smeared linen mask.

It makes her remorseful for the bitterness she has been cherishing against him because, instead of coming to her, he remained away with his new wife; and now it turns out that so far from being neglectful of the invalid, he started from Savannah within an hour of receiving Peyton's letter.

He had traveled day and night without halting; but besides the appearance of fatigue there is a degree of underlying sadness in the expression of his face, which, while it makes his mother feel painfully that she is no longer his chief confidant, causes her heart to ache pitifully over him.

"Oh, by the way, mater," he says, as they descend together to the dining-room, where a meal has been hurriedly extemporized, "Portia sends her love. She would have come with me only she is so very timid about infection."

The old lady's reply is to give the arm upon which she leans an affectionate little squeeze, as she says, tenderly:

"My dear boy!"

On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday Peyton comes and goes as usual, and the four are exceedingly happy; so much so, that it feels almost like the dear old times which can never come again, and Cherry nearly forgets her absent step-mother's existence.

On Thursday, however, a letter arrives which alters the state of matters.

It is from Mrs. Baskerville to her husband, and urges his immediate return in terms which evidently make him so uncomfortable that, out of pure pity, Ole Miss, with praiseworthy self-denial, feels bound to say:

"Go at once, my darling; only return to us soon."

The planter's departure, which took place that afternoon, left the others rather downcast; but, to quote Mammy Eunice, "De baddest as ebber were might be wusser," for on Friday, when Peyton returned from dining at home, he brought some news which literally made his auditors shed tears.

Mrs. Enderby's brother, a fabulously wealthy cotton-broker down South, had not long before

lost an only son, and now offered to adopt his younger nephew, who was requested to repair to New Orleans without delay.

"Whatever shall I do without you, Peyton?" sobbed Cherry. "I may as well die at once!"

"Nonsense! Cheer up, little woman; I am not going away for altogether! By the time I return though, I fear you will be such a splendid grown-up young lady that it will be an insult to call you 'little Mrs. P.,' eh?"

"Just as if I could ever forget you, Peyton!"

Next morning he rode over once more to take leave, and if anything could have added to the invalid's sorrow, it would have been the reflection how very unflattering must needs be the remembrance of her personal appearance he carried away in his mind's eye.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MISTRESS OF BASKERVILLE.

SIX months had come and gone since the advent of the second Mrs. Baskerville. So far as Ole Miss and Cherry were concerned, she had proved the reverse of a success; but it was her fault, not theirs, that she lived with them in a state of ruthless though concealed antagonism—concealed, that is to say, from the warm-hearted planter, who, while vaguely aware of a certain difference in the domestic atmosphere, fancied it would all come right by and by, and that ere long his cherished woman-kind would settle down comfortably together.

Since her illness Cherry had grown considerably, and now, instead of a tiny, sprite-like little mortal, was a tall, slender, lovely girl, looking very womanly for her fifteen years and a half.

Their new missie was no favorite with the colored folks, who looked up to massa, his mother and daughter with a quaintly affectionate sort of reverence which instinctively reminded one of patriarchal times in Palestine of old. Slavery in Virginia is now, as everybody knows, a thing of the past; but even when it obtained universally, there were masters and *masters*. With many people it was a theory that the higher born an owner the better, generally speaking, was the usage his negroes experienced, and that the old "F. F. V.'s," descended from good British or French families, felt it a sort of *noblesse oblige* to use with lordly leniency the darkies, whom they considered pretty much in the same light in which the Dougal creatures of his clan might have been viewed by a Highland chief. But however this might be, there could be little doubt that Frank Baskerville's Cavalier ancestors would have recognized in him the gentle, take-it-easy, yet brave spirit, which rendering them ornaments of a court in times of peace, led more than one of the race to die sword in hand at Sedgemoor, fighting loyally for their king,

So far as circumstances permitted, Baskerville had always been an ideally happy plantation.

So when Miss Possi began ordering the house niggers to be punished for trifles—as was the practice at Blue Ridge—deep was the indignation experienced in the “back yard;” and if the colored *vox populi* could have sentenced her to a whipping, it wasn’t forty stripes, save one, that would have satisfied her judges.

The saddle was, however, unanimously placed upon the right horse, and nobody dreamt of blaming “po’ dear massa” or their other two ladies for the obnoxious new style of domestic administration which, to do her justice, Miss Possi was cunning enough to carry on chiefly when her husband was not there to see.

For fear of distressing the planter, his mother and child smothered their grief and anger at incidents which daily occurred; but it was hard to remain silent when appealed to by some hitherto-good enough domestic about to undergo chastisement for upsetting a tea cup or letting a glass fall.

With the field hands Miss Possi had, of course, nothing to do.

It was a matter of infinite astonishment to the neighborhood that a handsome, wealthy man of family and position should have chosen to marry a daughter of Old Blue Ridge, especially after he had remained so long a widower.

Although, so far, on a social level with the Baskervilles, the Hawksleys, as Mrs. Enderby remarked, couldn’t tell who their great-grandfather was; and Portia, it turned out, was thirty-nine years of age, nearly twelve months older than her husband!

“And such a plain woman, too, sir,” said a gentleman from Charlotte county, who was smarting, just then, under a current report that he had once on a time proposed to Portia himself, and threatened to put a pistol to his head if she refused him. “Such a downright ugly woman, sir, and one of the coarsest individuals I ever came across! Baskerville must have been bewitched when he popped the question. Poor fellow! he will only repent the step he has taken once, but his repentance will be a life-long one. You may take my word for that, sir!”

Thus did the planter’s friends and acquaintances discuss among themselves his nuptials. Had he been aware of their animadversions, he would probably have said, in his pleasant, good-humored way, “Well, well; let them rave.”

And verily—

“If but the dearest heart that’s next our own
Knows not the reasons why we smile and sigh!”
how should mere ordinary associates compre-

hend the female tricks and cajolements and brazen impudence which, being brought to bear upon an honorable-minded, unsophisticated gentleman, beguiled him, almost in spite of himself, into making an offer to Miss Hawksley?

The steps which conduct to the hymeneal altar are occasionally more curious than admirable; and while Frank Baskerville would have felt insulted by the suggestion that he had proposed of his own free-will, there existed, deep down in his soul, a dim suspicion that if his mature charmer had not put the words into his mouth, she had at least forced him to speak them.

Now that she was his wife, they got on tolerably together, without much affection on either side. When not in her war-paint she looked her age, and anything but pretty; but she had the knack of keeping him amused, and he was not the man to dive into the profundities of existence.

Power was her idol; and even when moving heaven and earth to become Mrs. Baskerville, she never pretended to herself that she particularly cared for Frank as an individual.

The chief object of her life at present was to get rid of Ole Miss and Cherry, to make them privately so wretched that they would be glad to take their departure for good and all.

The petty insults, the cruel stabs in the back, which were of daily and hourly occurrence, nearly broke their hearts; but rather than make trouble between Mr. Baskerville and his wife, what was there that for his sake they would not have endured!

Thanks to Miss Possi’s *finesse*, they rarely saw him except at meals, when he appeared as amiable as ever, although anything like confidential conversation was an impossibility.

Gentle Mrs. Enderby had gone to the Sulphur Springs for her health; her eldest son, who was recently married, had removed to another county to reside upon his wife’s estate. So Peyton being still with his uncle in New Orleans, there was hardly any intercourse between the two families, who used to think it strange if they did not meet at least once a day. Mr. and Mrs. Baskerville visited a good deal, but her step-mother insisted Cherry was too young for mixing in general society, and the dear, stately, pretty old lady had no heart to go abroad in the company of her daughter-in-law. Like most of the Virginian planters, Mr. Baskerville possessed an excellent library, and in these latter days Cherry took to reading as determinedly as she had heretofore eschewed it, achieving wonders of self-culture under the grand-maternal auspices, besides practicing diligently upon the piano, although it was evident that she would never, like Orpheus, set the trees and beasts a-capering to her music. The gift of expressing it had been denied her,

but there was wonderful, if undeveloped, melody in Cherry's soul. To please dear Ole Miss, and also for the purpose of gratifying Edgar when next he came to Virginia, she worked away bravely at minims and crotchets, quavers and semi-quavers, but the ethereal music which sometimes enthralled her spirit, generally fled at the sound of the notes touched mechanically by her fingers.

Edgar wrote from time to time, but though his heart had not changed, yet an aspiring collegian striving to make up his "lee-way" has scant leisure for epistolary correspondence, even if university details and *on dits* were likely to interest the dear little Virginian over whose non-literary proclivities they used so often to quarrel.

Things at home were altered with the youth as well as with Cherry, for on the return-passage from Europe Doctor Dennison had lost his middle-aged heart to a young lady very little older than Edgar and was now married.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAGEDY OF A NIGHT.

GLORIOUS weather!

Such a splendid "fall" had not been for twenty years! The gums, and maples, and locusts were blazing in scarlet, and amber, and emerald! And to walk in the woods was to fancy Aladdin's enchanted jewel fruits had suddenly become a nineteenth century reality.

Algernon Frank, the baby-heir, was eight months old. His birth had been celebrated by grand festivities, but because he was Miss Possi's son the negroes on the land owed him a grudge for ousting their own Miss Cherry from the possession of themselves and the estate.

To-morrow the infant was going with his parents first to visit the Hawksleys at Blue Ridge, and afterward to spend a few weeks at the Sulphur Springs.

Cherry and her grandmother would also have been benefited by change of air and scene, but as such a thing had not been suggested by Mr. Baskerville, they both felt too hurt to hint at it themselves.

The situation had become more and more embarrassing, till sometimes the old lady doubted whether it was right for her and her granddaughter to remain.

Frank's wife still held to her resolution that, either by fair means or foul, they should be compelled to take their departure; but a malicious woman has many ways of making the house too hot for unwelcome inmates besides openly setting it on fire. She behaved with the fiendish duplicity of a Spanish Inquisitor; yet, although her victims took no notice of the misery that was hourly heaped

upon them, even the easy-going planter began at last to suspect there was a hitch of some sort in the domestic machinery,

Ever since he remembered, his mother had been remarkable for her amiability, and what an engaging darling his little pocket-Venus used to be! But now, though, so far as he noticed, there were never what could be called "rows" between his wife and the other two, yet now and again, with a shrug of her lean shoulders and a sinister smile, his wife insinuated that her mother-in-law was fond of interfering; while, to tell the truth, Cherry's jealousy of her brother was so unnatural, that really the dear child's life was not safe.

What could the poor man do? Even had his mother and daughter made any complaint, what could he do? It certainly was not love for his wife which kept him from endeavoring to make the other ladies of more consequence in the house. If anybody had told him the right steps to take, he would at once have stood up openly for Cherry and his mother; but by this time he was only too well aware that, when thwarted, Portia was a very uncomfortable companion indeed.

The cheap fireworks style of fascinations whereby she had captured him had long since become as damp gunpowder, and if ever a man was thoroughly shaken out of a very brief illusion, Frank Baskerville was the person. If one is rarely a hero to one's *valet-de-chambre*, was it likely that a plain "made-up" woman of forty, who gave way to solvenly habits when there was no company except her husband, would retain a hold of his affections?

In spite of being no doubt proud of his boy, the planter, if he would have allowed himself to believe it, was far from happy; yet what was there he could do in the circumstances to put matters on a better footing? Living under the roof where not so very long ago love and cheerfulness reigned, he was practically almost as much a stranger to his mother and daughter as if the Atlantic separated them; yet to ask them to find a home elsewhere would not only give rise to scandal, but be a sin and a shame.

In desperation, he began to wish somebody would marry Cherry. He would stretch a point to give her a goodly portion, although she was no longer an heiress. Marry his Cherry! Ah, how little he would have believed three years since that the time ever would come when to get rid of his daughter and mother would be hailed by him as a blessing!

Mr. Baskerville had always rather piqued himself upon his chivalrous instincts; but when an evil helpmate has got the upper hand of a person, chivalry is apt to go to the wall.

It was about three P. M.

Mr. Baskerville had ridden to a neighboring

plantation for a chat and a smoke with the owner. Under his wife's superintendence a couple of negresses were in her chamber packing trunks and valises for next day's journey, while Minerva, a Topsy-like girl of twelve, fetched and carried according to orders.

The bed and lounges were spread with laces, gauzes, and other items of female paraphernalia, and upon the drawers stood a pint bottle of dye labeled Syrian wash for the hair. Niggers are born mimics, and having some ten minutes before through an open window overheard two of the domestics taking off her own manner to the life, Miss Possi's temper was in an explosive state.

If her attendants made the slightest mistake in folding or placing the garments now in hand, her eyes seemed to snap fire; and when, unfortunately, 'Nerva happened to tip over the Syrian hair-lotion into a box of pale French kid-gloves at three dollars a pair, her mistress lost command of herself for the moment. She struck at the girl with an open pen-knife, which by chance was in her hand, and though the wound was neither deep nor deadly, it bled freely, several large drops falling right upon the crown of Miss Possi's grand new white terry velvet hat.

The *contretemps* altogether was most provoking; but it was a mistake for a white lady to make bad worse and degrade herself by assaulting the stupid little nigger in a furious fashion, which caused the other two darkies to insist afterward, "Dat de ole Sarpint hisself am not a bigger debbil nor Miss Possi!"

On quitting the room to have her injuries attended to, 'Nerva fled to the back yard to the cabin of a lame woman named Rhoda, one of several tailoresses whose occupation was to make up the slaves' clothing from cloth grown and woven on the estate.

Like Aunt Nancy, Rhoda got the credit of understanding "obi," and possessed a fetish in the shape of a ball of red clay stuck over with cocks' feet. Her medical powers were also in great repute, and many was the salve, and unguent, and philter she privately administered to the darkies, composed of herbs gathered during the light half of the month with mysterious incantations.

"What dat?" says 'Nerva, pushing her woolly pate in at the door with her hand swathed in her pinafore.

Rhoda was seated upon a stone, crouching over the fire, and muttering as she stirred something in a pipkin.

"What dat, Aunt Rhoda?"

"Suffen fo' po' Aunt Nancy's back. Done got de rh'umatics mighty bad, po' ole gal; but be quiet, chile; spoil dis if you speak," she added, resuming the muttered spell.

Presently the embrocation, or whatever it was, being ready, it was set aside to cool; and

after binding up 'Nerva's wound, Aunt Rhoda returned to what was termed the tailoring-shop, where her work lay.

By-and-by, Mrs. Baskerville's packing being satisfactorily accomplished, she sent an order to the kitchen that when Aunt Sally sent in baby's pap, a bowl of chicken-tea should also be brought for her own refreshment.

As ill-luck would have it, 'Nerva, who was hanging about idle, heard the message delivered, and when the cook's back was turned, managed to transfer a drop or two of the magic liniment not only into the infant's pap, but the chicken-tea of her detested mistress.

It was just such a trick as a monkey might have played, and the wench had no idea of doing more than venting her childish spite in retaliation for the hurt on her hand.

Shortly before sundown, as the planter was ambling homeward, in a cheerfully placid state of mind after a pleasant time with the neighbors he had gone to visit, he was startled at meeting his groom riding *ventre a terre* on the best horse in his stable.

"Oh, Lor', massa!" cried the man, "Ole Miss done send me fetch you quick. Miss Possi am dying, and Massa Algy, too! For de Lor's sake, come quick!"

"What could have happened?" Terribly alarmed, and without stopping to cross-question the messenger, Mr. Baskerville put his horse to the gallop, and in a wonderfully short space reached home to find the baby in convulsions; his wife livid in the face, and writhing in agony; Ole Miss and Cherry distracted with terror and drowned in tears; and the household generally in a state of semi-manicacal frenzy impossible to be imagined by those who have not actually beheld our colored brethren wrought up to a high pitch of excitement. The old lady had dispatched a stableman for the doctor, but so rapid was the action of the poison that, just as he alighted at the gate, Algernon Francis Baskerville fled away to the paradise on high, where sinless baby angels,

"Amid the radiant faces
That shine on them alway,
Shall never see the traces
Of estrangement or decay."

For Mrs. Baskerville, little could be done even to allay her pain, and at midnight she too passed away.

One can imagine the consternation of the wretched woman's husband and mother-in-law and step-daughter. The doctor, although he knew little of toxicology as a science, declared the present were such clear cases of poisoning that there could be no mistake about them.

Messengers on fleet steeds were dispatched to fetch the nearest magistrate and another physician, but both chanced to be absent, and

by the time they did arrive the caskets were already, by Doctor Randolph's order, screwed down. The weather was exceptionally hot for the season, and decomposition set in so rapidly, that to leave the coffins open would be dangerous for the living, and might in all probability inaugurate a deadly epidemic.

The other physician indorsed Dr. Randolph's opinion; but the magistrate, being a red-tapist "Jack-in-office" sort of individual, hummed and hawed, and thought it no end of a pity not to institute a searching inquiry as to who had committed the double murder and what the motive had been.

And, in truth, the mysteriousness of the hideous catastrophe was so distressing to the surviving members of the family, that they felt utterly crushed.

The perpetrator of the crime must have been influenced by a very strong motive—must, as the English law has it, "have expected to be benefited by the death of the victims." Even for an instant to imagine sweet, pretty Cherry a murderess was maddening; and yet there was no denying the fact that she was the only party who would directly profit by the removal of her juvenile brother.

This conception of how the recovery of her position as the heiress of Baskerville would strike outsiders flashed like lightning through the brain of the maiden herself.

In her grandmother's chamber, kneeling before the weeping old lady, with her arms clasped round her waist and her face hidden in her lap, poor Cherry kept moaning:

"Oh, darling grannie, they can't imagine I did it, surely? Poor little Algy!—as if— Oh—oh—oh!"

"Hush—hush, my pet!" replied the other. "I should as soon believe I killed him myself!"

The cook's deposition was duly taken regarding the pap and chicken-tea; and the servant who carried them from the kitchen to the house, being somewhat confused in her theology, asseverated, by "Gor-A'mighty!" and also "de debil and um's angels!" that she had not so much as lifted the covers of the basins in transition.

Not a drop was left to tell tales. Algy's mess, for an infant, had been a very small one; and Miss Possi, with whom chicken-tea was a favorite refection, had drank it right off.

A sort of floating notion got about in the yard that for the good of the community, perhaps, Aunt Rhoda's fetish had done away with Miss Possi; but the tailoress was so indignant that nothing more was said on the subject.

The weather, as has been said, was exceptionally warm for the time of year, and, possi-

bly owing to the poison, decomposition set in so rapidly that it was not prudent to delay the double interment even for the forty-eight hours prescribed by law; so preparations were made with all speed for the celebration of the obsequies in the parish church, while a message was dispatched to Blue Ridge to announce what had befallen, and to entreat the presence of the Hawksley family.

Frank Baskerville, with his gentle nature, was so unhinged that Mr. Enderby, the most sympathetic of men, felt bound to come to the front, just as his son Peyton did on the occasion of Cherry's illness.

The coffins were of rosewood, with a square pane of glass for exhibiting the face of the deceased to the friends usually expected to assemble in church to hear the minister read a short service and behold the corpse lie in state upon the communion table attired in his or her finest raiment.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MAIDEN FAIR TO SEE.

It was not the invited funeral guests alone who came to the funeral, but anybody who had casually met, seen, or heard of the deceased, and wished to show respect to the family.

In the present instance, however, precedent was of necessity departed from in the several details. Instead of the pane on the coffin-lid being used as a sort of sepulchral peep-show, a tiny curtain of white silk was drawn over it, and who shall blame dear Ole Miss and the grandchild if in their inmost souls they were thankful exceedingly to be, even at so appalling a cost, spared the conventional necessity of superintending the dead woman's final toilet which, instead of the linen sheets in which she was hurriedly enwrapped, would in normal circumstances have consisted of her best company-gown of blush-pink satin, a head-dress of roses, white kid gloves and shoes, and the handsome rose topaz necklace and ear-rings presented to his bride by her husband on their wedding-day.

Not that all this finery would have been interred with the unconscious wearer. No; betwixt the always touching episode of the funeral service performed in church by the clergyman and the actual burial, the usual interval of several hours would have afforded time for the substitution of a more suitable mortuary costume; at least, as a matter of fact, the instances were few and far between where purple and fine linen were made over to darkness and the worms.

Universal compassion was felt for Mr. Baskerville, so suddenly and awfully bereft of wife and son; but a few of the real old F.F.V.'s, who believed in blue blood, were privately of opinion that as a wise Providence does everything for the best, it was perhaps as well that

Cherry should inherit the plantation. Her descent on both sides was unimpeachably aristocratic, while as likely as not the grandson of Old Blue Ridge would, had he been spared, poor child! have eventually proved anything but a credit to their own order.

The babe and his mother were laid in the family burying-ground, a little way beyond the garden, where, in fact, by standing on tip-toe at a particular place, one could see the white memorial-stones of several generations. To Northern notions it does not, perhaps, convey a congruous idea of the fitness of things to bury one's dead within a few feet of a spot where members of the household are pretty sure to spend many of their merriest hours, but custom reconciles us to much.

When all was over, two of the Miss Hawksleys hinted pretty broadly that they would have no objection to remain some time with the widower for a consolatory visit, but the offer was not accepted, and once more the trio who used to need nothing better than one another's society were left together, as it had hardly appeared they would ever be again. Strange to say, however, the unacknowledged sense of estrangement which had gradually obtained between the ladies and Frank did not, as might have been expected, at once disperse when they were, so to speak, remanded into the daily life of three years before.

Who does not know the nameless disappointment of returning among the companions and surroundings of early youth, fondly longed for and idealized in memory during years of absence? After a while, probably, the brilliant actuality of the present partly overlays those reminiscences of long ago, which we mistook for recollections of paradise, and as the poet sings, even:

"The graves that the bird's note brightens
Grow bright—for the bird."

But enough of moralizing, which some may perhaps be inclined to call by a less complimentary name.

The fact was, that instead of the pretty, impulsive child who used to be her father's pet and plaything, Cherry had become a beautiful woman—a patent fact which at first gave him a rather saddening sense of personal loss.

They had for many a day been so near, yet so far apart, that he scarcely felt as if the graceful young lady who, to save his mother trouble, officiated behind the coffeepot at breakfast was his own daughter, and it actually gave him a half-amused sensation to find himself instinctively doing the gallant.

By-and-by, however, matters settled down into their former footing; and seated in a dear old porch of an afternoon, Mrs. Baskerville rocking gently and fanning herself, while Cherry's lovely face gazed up from his shoul-

der, the last three years soon began to seem but as a bad dream when one awaketh.

The mysteriousness of Mrs. Baskerville's death was still painful to contemplate; but somebody had lately started the idea that possibly, in a momentary fit of mania, she had murdered her child and committed suicide. In spite of this supposition, however, a handsome marble cross was erected to her memory; but as a report got abroad among the slaves that her "spook" (ghost) walked o' nights in the immediate vicinity of the burial-ground, not a soul would venture near after sundown.

As the melon-patch which supplied the big house with daily fruit lay in the same direction, this superstitious terror was in one sense a boon to their betters, seeing that, as a rule, the choicest melons were usually purloined during the silent watches of the night.

Next to fat bacon, your nigger dearly loves his watermelon; but he would have been a bold man indeed, who, for the sake of a dainty stolen feed, would have risked a midnight meeting with Miss Possi's "spook."

Meanwhile, Minerva—to give her her full designation—justified it by maintaining what in canny Scotland is termed a "calm sough." When her deceased mistress chanced to be mentioned, her face assumed a neutral-tinted hue, but nobody noticed it; and being naturally a smart, handy little nigger, she was now being trained as a sort of assistant lady's-maid by Cherry's beloved and faithful *femme de chambre*, good old Mammy Eunice.

Doctor Dennison had written kindly and feelingly to his old friend. His practice was increasing, his young wife flourishing, and they had a couple of infant sons.

A sympathetic letter had also been received from Edgar, who was still at Harvard, where he was carrying everything before him.

Twelve months more would see his college curriculum completed, but his mind was not yet made up regarding a profession. His father wanted him to go in for medicine, with a view to being adopted as a partner by himself, but the young prizeman's own aim was to obtain a professional chair in some department, either at his own alma mater or Yale. Moral philosophy and physical science were the branches in which he especially excelled.

Every minute of his time, for the next year at any rate, was already appropriated, so there appeared no chance of another visit to Virginia; but now and again, when some accidental link of associations recalled Cherry, he would wonder to himself if the dear, pretty, piquant, book detesting companion of other days was still as charmingly provoking as she used to be when he lectured her upon her ignorance, and tried to drag her up to the level, not of his own algebraic and classical acquirements, but to the pitch of mental culture which, in his

opinion, it was absolutely necessary for a lady to possess.

Nearly three years had flown since he last beheld her—a period of time which often, at her age, works such a change upon an individual as almost amounts to transformation; but still, when she came before his mind's eye, it was usually as the short, slight, sweet, saucy little fairy-like Cherry of other days.

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW INMATE.

NOBODY acquainted with the Baskervilles could for a moment imagine their *rejoicing* over Miss Possi's withdrawal from this sublunary sphere; but it is simply saying they were human when we state that since her demise the three-conventional mourners were penetrated through and through with a blissful sense of personal *bien etre*. Individually, they neither confessed to their own souls nor owned it to one another; but there the fact was notwithstanding.

In resuming the position she had so long held as mistress of the household, the old lady frequently felt as if in a dream, or was the late miserable three years' episode a nightmare from which she had just awakened?

Oh, the luxury of once more weighing stores and measuring out rations, of giving medicine and little dainties to those of the slaves who happened to be sick! Ah! the delight of again being able without let or hindrance, frowns or insults, to wander at will up-stairs and down-stairs, all over the house! It was like Canaan after Egypt to the Hebrew of old.

And then the pleasant afternoon in the beloved old porch with her son and grandchild, and the glorious moonlight nights! Many a time had the two women, when too wretched to sleep, gazed through tears at the silvered shade-trees in the yard.

Now, what deep ecstasy it was only to look up at the Queen of Night as she sailed in effulgent beauty through the starry blue.

But "passing away" is written alike on earthly joys and griefs. As a last-century poet has it—

"Build not thy nest on any tree,
For God to Death hath sold the forest."

It was while sitting with her two beloved ones in the porch, admiring a magnificent sunset, that Mrs. Baskerville first discovered the sight of her right eye was darkened.

"Do look at those purple clouds, grannie! Did you ever behold anything more grand?" said Cherry. She was upon a stool at the old lady's feet; and, with her elbow upon the other's knee, and her chin upon her own palm, sat gazing westward wistfully. "Isn't it lovely, papa? I believe it is quite true what people say, that in all the world there are no sunsets equal to those of our own Virginia."

"So everybody tells us; and I suppose what everybody says is bound to be true, my pet, eh?"

Presently the sun began to sink rapidly toward the horizon; and as the happy little party prepared to retire for the night, Mrs. Baskerville happened to look in the direction of a particular mountain in the Blue Ridge range. With a sort of vague alarm, she found one of her eyes was dimmer than the other.

Blindness was a calamity of which she had always had a peculiar dread; but perhaps this might be only a temporary ailment. She would hope for the best, and not sadden the two by speaking out in the mean time.

"Grandmamma," said Cherry, three or four days afterward, "you are either ill or over-exerting yourself. Give me the keys, and take a rest from your labors, you dear old darling! Shame upon me not to have thought of it before! Never fear! I shall manage nicely. This is the day, isn't it, for Uncle Sundry to get more quinine for his chills? How many grains must I put into each powder? But never mind. I'll get Mammy Eunice to show me what to do."

Poor Ole Miss burst into tears, and then it came out that there was no mistake about it—she was growing blind.

With her arms clasped round her neck, Cherry wept for company. Without her grandmother to lean upon for guidance, and help, and comfort, life appeared an impossibility. The planter's sensations were somewhat similar, but the family doctor when called in said there was nothing to distress themselves about so terribly. True, a cataract was forming upon the old lady's right eye, but by-and-by it could easily be removed without the slightest pain.

"How soon?"

"Oh, possibly not for several years! The scale must cover the entire pupil before it is fit for being operated upon."

To Frank he privately mentioned his apprehension that the other eye would follow suit, but advised that his mother should be kept as cheerful as possible, and all would yet be well.

For a week or two things went on pretty much as before, except that her son and granddaughter were, if possible, more tender than ever over the graceful, assiduous house-mistress, who still went as usual about her duties, but with a touching air of half-retrospective, half-anticipative sadness, which neither could, perhaps, quite understand.

But once more to quote Mammy Eunice—"De baddest t'ing dat ebber was might be wusser;" for pitiful as it was to think of the dark days in store for Mrs. Baskerville, an accident soon occurred which rendered her helpless in the immediate present.

While out at the bacon-house giving some

orders one morning, Cherry's little terrier dashing across the floor caused the old lady to fall heavily down several steps, where she lay in a dead faint.

When the doctor arrived he found she had sustained a compound fracture of her ankle. Setting it proved a difficult as well as painful affair; but it was satisfactorily accomplished, and the gentle patient's uncomplaining fortitude excited quite an enthusiastic degree of admiration on the part of her attendants. Her recovery progressed as favorably as could be expected; but for many months she would be confined to a couch. So, in the mean time, what was to be done about managing an establishment which, as was usual, comprehended not only the master's dwelling, but the cabins of some hundred and fifty slaves.

Further South, where matters were on a different footing, twice or even thrice that number would be kept on an estate; but viewed as chattels rather than humble members of a large family, as was frequently the case in Old Virginny.

Of course on an extensive property such as Baskerville a white overseer was kept, besides several colored subs; but the yard being like a populous village, where every article required for clothing, etc., was manufactured on the spot, the mistress had a good deal to do in the way of supervision.

However willing, Cherry was neither old enough nor sufficiently experienced to step into the old lady's shoes in the present emergency. So after an anxious consultation between Mr. Baskerville and his mother, it was decided to procure, if possible, a hired female factotum.

While perfectly sensible of the necessity for such an assistant, Ole Miss was nevertheless sorely exercised in spirit on the subject, as the individual must be white and so far educated.

Now that the planter should suffer himself to be entrapped into taking a third wife was not likely. A burned child dreads the fire. Yet it is hard to tell what foolish steps even the best of men may be tempted to take in a rash moment—ay, in spite of wretched experiences; and to imagine a second Miss Possi luring her son into matrimony, as a snake attracts a helpless bird to its doom, made the invalid shiver.

Advertisements were inserted in various papers without success; but at length, by a curious concatenation of circumstances, which, *per se*, have nothing to do with this story, and therefore need not be gone into—an intimation published in the *Charleston Picayune* was replied to from New York, and one of the persons to whom the applicant referred for testimonials of character and efficiency was Doctor Dennison. So his old friend, Mr. Baskerville,

therefore wrote and duly received a reply, which was so far satisfactory.

Mrs. Dennison and Miss Morton had been at school together, and the doctor himself recollected her father before he migrated with his family to California, where, after realizing a colossal fortune, he lost it, died, and left his only child without a cent!

"My wife," he continued, "says that Barbara Morton was always considered by the other girls quite a pattern of activity and conscientiousness; and she desires me to add, with her compliments, that if we were in want of a person to fill such a situation as yours, Barbara Morton should undoubtedly be the successful candidate. By the by, I should mention that she is three or four years older than my wife; about six or seven-and-twenty, I believe. Nothing wonderful in the way of looks, but a lady-like young woman."

Miss Morton was accordingly corresponded with, and duly engaged to put in an appearance at Baskerville as soon as possible.

She arrived. A small, pale, rather melancholy-looking individual, with soft hazel eyes, silky brown hair, and a wide, sensitive mouth. Till they saw her, it had been left an open question whether she should have a separate table or take her food with the family.

The situation she was to fill being entirely begotten of the present domestic condition, there was no conventional precedent to follow in this matter of meals, but Miss Morton had not been five minutes in their company before her employers mentally resolved that she *must* be treated as a gentlewoman.

Ere long, the old lady became quite fond of her "lieutenantess," as Cherry called her. Nothing could be better than the style of management she displayed, and in every department things went on like clockwork.

So far from thrusting herself forward, or needing an occasional snub, she was if anything rather too retiring, as if determined neither to forget nor suffer others to ignore the fact that she was a hired person receiving wages.

One morning, when the head overseer, a tall, fair, tolerably-educated man of thirty, happened to speak to her more familiarly than he would have presumed to address his master's mother or daughter, she calmly looked him over from head to foot in a way which, while it made him wish himself elsewhere, produced her an enemy from that day forth. Yet, to do Ullathorne justice, he only intended to be friendly.

"Long-descended aristocrats—F. F. V.'s of the first magnitude, such as the Baskervilles—were naturally entitled to respect from their inferiors, whether white, yellow, or black; but what, pray, was this whey-faced, upsetting chit but a servant like himself, he should wish to know?"

"I don't think I like her, grannie dear," remarked Cherry, some weeks after Miss Morton's advent in Virginia. "One would

imagine I was a spy, by the way in which she avoids giving a direct answer to even the most unimportant questions. I never in my life knew such a studious reticent individual. Since it was Doctor Dennison to whom papa applied about her character, she must, of course, be well acquainted with the family. Yet only this morning, when I incidentally inquired if it made much difference to Edgar having a step-mother, not a word would she tell me except "I do not know;" and one day lately when I happened to ask, "don't you think Edgar a perfectly lovely name?" what do you suppose she did instead of replying, but blush as if all the blood in her body had rushed to her face! I never saw her change color before, but Edgar's name certainly made her rosy for once. I can't pretend to like a person very much who is so close about her antecedents, can you? And it strikes me that papa—although he is too amiable, of course, to say so—doesn't particularly care about her either."

"Well, well, honey," said Ole Miss, with an inward *Te Deum* for the last suggestion, "it does not become us to inquire into her private affairs so long as the duties she undertakes to perform are thoroughly done. She certainly is a great comfort in the mean time, and in three or four months, if I go on as well as I am doing, Doctor Randolph hopes I may be about again as well as ever I was. Poor thing! If she does not carry her heart upon her sleeve, she is, at least, very inoffensive."

"Oh, don't mistake me, grannie! I do not hate her at all, but—"

"Besides, my darling, people in the North are not so outspoken and simple-minded as we Virginians. I, of course, infinitely prefer our Southern style; but, after all, when we come to think of it, what can be expected from the descendants of gloomy fanatics who slew their lawful king, and then fled to America to save their necks from the hangman?"

"But, gran'ma, the Dennisons' ancestors were among those who came over in the Mayflower, and Edgar told me that."

"My sweetest child, there are exceptions to every rule," said Ole Miss, who greatly prided herself upon her minute knowledge of the details of history.

CHAPTER X.

OLD MEMORIES.

WINTERS down South, although short, are occasionally Arctic in their severity.

It was so the year Mrs. Baskerville met with her accident. In spite of gleaming logs of hickory heaped up in the huge big-jambed fire-places, the cold even indoors was sometimes almost unbearable, and once or twice the walls of the house were incrustated with ice an inch

deep, while the eaves were garnished with icicles nearly as long as your arm.

The old lady's recovery was seriously retarded by the inclemency of the season; and with her sight slowly growing dimmer, and unable to move off her lounge, the only wonder was she kept up her spirits as well as she did.

Cherry and her father were indefatigable in their efforts to cheer and solace her; but what would have become of them all in this trying time without Miss Morton? Although still as silent as ever about her own concerns, nobody could say those of her employers were not efficiently attended to. She was a second edition of the virtuous woman in the Book of Proverbs. If she did not open her mouth in wisdom, she took care that those about her had food convenient to put into theirs; and albeit the colored servants of the household were not clothed in scarlet, they found themselves remarkably comfortable attired in the native dark-blue cloth of home-grown cotton mixed with cow's hair. Among the neighboring families festivities of various sorts helped to while away the dismal season; but neither Cherry nor her father inclined to gad about while their cherished invalid remained so poorly. On the whole, it was the dreariest time the Baskervilles had ever spent, with the exception—*bien entendu*—of Miss Possi's reign. Spring, when it arrived, proved so gray and chilly as to belie its name; but when the people were feeling thoroughly disheartened, a change suddenly passed over the face of nature as if a magician had waved his wand.

The sun, which one dreary east-windy evening set subduedly over groves of arid branches and dry twigs, rose brilliantly next morning upon a fairy-like world of blossoms. During the night the atmosphere had all at once become delightfully genial; and, lo! at dawn, the winter was over and gone. Flowers appeared on the earth; the time of the singing of birds was come, and the voice of the turtle was heard in the land. One could fancy a shower of rare exotics had fallen, palest pink, deep rose, and delicate lemon; but upon the dogwood trees especially it appeared to have rained what looked like pure white camellias.

Every one immediately felt lighter and brighter, as if with the leaden sky a weight had lifted from their bodies. Dear Ole Miss took heart, and hoped she would now get well rapidly, and as for the field hands, quaintly jocund as were the plantation songs extemporized while at their labor, they were "solemn, sad, and slow" compared to the wildly hilarious shouts with which they came trooping into the back yard when, at noon, the horn blew for dinner.

Under the bluest of skies, Mr. and Mrs.

Enderby rode over in the afternoon, to charm their friendly neighbors with the news that Peyton was coming home for a visit.

"And, by-the-by, Cherry," said the young man's mother, "there is something in his letter which concerns you. Here, dear, read it for yourself; although, perhaps, it is hardly fair to let you do so. Look where he says, 'I wonder if mine ancient spouse-elect is as much altered as I fear you will find me? Don't believe the photos you have received periodically, nor one-half of uncle Edward's flattering descriptions of his nephew and partner. I trust 'little Mrs. P.' admires a hirsute style of masculine physiognomy, as nowadays I am a big, burly fellow, with no end of a beard and enormous whiskers.'"

The prospect of seeing Peyton again had quite a cheering effect upon Ole Miss, and greatly delighted Cherry, although Edgar Dennison had all along figured as the hero of her girlish day-dreams. Months and years, however, had passed since their last hurried parting at the gate, and so much had happened in the interval that, albeit the youthful heiress would have considered it almost sacrilegious to suppose her first love was not securely enshrined in her heart of hearts, time, distance, and the stilted style of their few epistolary communications had, sooth to say, so far obliterated Edgar's image that her devotion was a sort of idolization, clinging to a happy past with which he was connected, rather than any more defined feeling.

If they ever met again, it might not be for years, and in the mean time here was dear, good Peyton coming back, very wealthy, and sure to be immediately pounced upon as a great "catch" by several parents with daughters to dispose of.

"Well, ladies," said the planter, coming into the parlor shortly after the Enderbys left with an open letter in his hand; "I am very sure it is very true that it never rains but it pours! Guess who is coming?"

"Peyton!" cried Cherry. "We know all about it, papa; Mr. and Mrs. Enderby have just been calling, and brought us this letter to read."

"Yes, I met them and heard all that; but he is not the person I mean. Guess again."

"Not Doctor Dennison, surely?" queried the invalid.

"No; but Edgar, Cherry's old playfellow! Dennison writes me that he has worked so hard at Harvard, that his health will finally break down altogether unless he has immediate change of air and complete rest for a couple of months. He wants to know if we will receive him here. Going away alone among strangers would do him more harm than good, and—"

"Of course, Frank, it will be a great pleas-

ure to us all to see him again; he was such a nice, sensible boy."

"But, my dear mother, are you quite certain that it will not incommode you to have a stranger with us till you get stronger?"

"Not in the very least, my son; I only regret not being able to see personally after the little odds and ends of comforts which his delicate state of health may require; but I am sure Miss Morton will do her best. When does the doctor say we may expect him?"

"On Friday, if all is well. I think I shall go in the carriage myself to meet him at Farmville."

If the young heiress had of late occasionally found existence slightly dull and eventless, she could not now declare that nothing ever happened at Easkerville, and that one day was the ditto of another.

On the contrary, here, from opposite quarters of the Union, and most unexpectedly, were two gentlemen coming, who had once in a sort of way been rivals for her favor.

Although too young and innocent at the time to understand this, yet looking back from the more advanced stand-point of early womanhood, she could now, with quaintly-mingled sensations of fun and romance, descry what—had the actors been older—might have been a rather racy domestic melodrama.

Like the slides of a magic-lantern, bygone scenes flitted before her. Edgar's arrival with his father; her own awe of the boy, and the hold he gradually got over her, till, as they say, she could have put her neck under his feet to please him; her depressing inward conviction that, in spite of this, he was too learned and educated to care much about one so stupid as he gave her to understand she was; the consequent hugging more closely to her heart, as it were, her father's love and her grandmother's, which always had been and always would be her very own! Then came the memorable day of the Hawksleys' visit, and her own well-remembered indignation at Edgar for paying so much attention to Miss Possi's conversation; the flight to the garden-bower of the distracted, white-frocked, pink-sashed little figure, weeping wildly because nobody loved her any more! Then again, she seemed to hear Edgar's footsteps approaching in the soft purple dusk; to be clasped in his arms—to hear his voice saying, "You foolish little Cherry! even should your papa marry Miss Portia, I at least will always love you better than anybody else in all the world!"

Then the pictures changed, and she beheld Peyton acting as a kind of ministering angel to her and her grandmother in their sore trouble. What a dear, kind, good fellow he had always been; so manly, yet so tender!

As if it were but yesterday, she remembered her first sight of him, stooping over the fire as

he stirred the lard to anoint her face; that, and the lightning-bug fluttering round the room and resting on his head like a star! How strange it was that her rather tall, stately self should have been dubbed "little Mrs. P.;" but how nice it was, too, of dear old Peyton to recollect all about it now that he was a wealthy gentleman in an immense way of business."

The secret worship of Edgar had become with the young heiress a time-honored institution, for the indefinite continuance of which the actual presence of the adored object was quite unnecessary; yet the idea of meeting him face to face, and not him only, but his former rival, made her feel as Mammy Eunice might have expressed it, "All oberish an' nohow." No girl could be less vain of her personal appearance; yet for the first time in her life, "What shall I wear the day Edgar arrives?" now perplexed her thoughts. Mammy, on the other hand, though she said nothing, was more taken up about "fixing off" her young mistress becomingly for Massa Peyton's behoof.

As well as if she had been told, she was aware of the relatively altered positions of the two expected visitors, and knew that whereas "Dat po' dear Massa Eggar" was no longer an only son, but would have to fight his own way in the world, Massa Peyton was rich now, and would at his uncle's death be one of the wealthiest men "down Souf."

What with open doors and windows, and the numbers of domestics kept in a house, one's affairs were, generally speaking, as well known in the cabin as in the parlor—better sometimes, as on the present occasion—for a whispered report, current in the back yard, that "Our Miss Cherry gwine marry Massa Enderby's rich son," was certainly never started either by Mr. Baskerville or Ole Miss. Not in so many words, that is to say; but it is astonishing how smart niggers sometimes are in drawing inferences and putting this and that together. Nowadays, the planter was in no hurry to dispose of his beautiful heiress, any more than "dear grannie" wanted to lose the comfort of her company. Yet it is just possible the idea may have struck them both that, if "little Mrs. P." became a future millionaire's wife in good earnest, why, worse things might happen.

As for young Dennison, by mutual though unuttered, consent, he was voted quite out of the running.

"How sad it is for the poor fellow," remarked Ole Miss, in her soft, sympathetic voice, "to possess fine talents, and yet have such poor health that the chances are he will never be able to do much with them! Really, Frank, I think it was excessively selfish of Edgar's father to marry again at his time of

life, and have a young family on his hands to be educated and set out in the world. I hope dear Edgar will make a nice long stay with us. Our climate did him so much good before!"

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE'S DREAM.

TIME, 3.20 P.M.

Weather, heavenly.

Miles and miles of peach-orchards, all a-blooming and a-growing in pink and white; scores of acres of apple-trees, sweetly decked in white and green, giving to the whole country-side the aspect of a floral *fete* on an immense scale. Far away, the translucent green-blue sky is defined into a mighty semi-circle by the purple peaks of the Blue Ridge range of mountains; while in the nearer distance wide-stretching forests of cedar and pine show darkly solemn amid the general brightness.

Near Baskerville, a lady and gentleman are riding slowly on horseback. She wears an unbleached linen habit, and a sun-bonnet of white lawn, with the usual deep front, and curtain behind nearly down to the waist. Nothing could be more graceful than the figure or simpler than the garb. If one could have peeped at the charming, flower-like face hidden in the white depths of the sun-shade, its expression just then would—with due reverence be it spoken—have instinctively brought to mind the angels veiling their faces with their wings, so erratic was the joy of it, so profound the self-abnegating look of humility.

Is there any need to say the maiden was Frank Baskerville's heiress, and her tall, fair, distinguished-looking companion young Dennison?

Nearly a fortnight elapsed since the Harvard prize-man returned to his old friends, to be welcomed like a son by the planter and his mother.

And Cherry? Well, instead of she and Edgar resuming their intimacy where they left it off, what did the two heedless young people do but fall over head and ears in love at sight, as madly and suddenly as if they had never set eyes upon each other before.

Both were so very much altered that the past had little, if anything, to do with it; though to revive former associations might perhaps help by-and-by to shed a sort of sacred tenderness over the entrancing glow of the absorbing affection with which their hearts and nerves now palpitated and thrilled.

Edgar's health improved daily; and, as some of his old acquaintances in the back yard remarked, "Him had done growed a berry fine gent indeed!"

"He looks fit for a president, and is a 'level-headed gentleman,' poor fellow!" said the planter to Ole Miss, who heartily indorsed the opinion.

Peyton's return home had been delayed by business, but he was now expected shortly; in fact, it was to inquire whether he was likely to arrive next day or the following one that Miss Baskerville and her handsome escort were now on their way to the Enderbys—to inform themselves how long it would be before he came to intrude into their present elysium, would, however, be nearer the mark.

So good and kind as Peyton used always to be, Cherry positively hated herself for fervently hoping that the affairs which had already detained him in New Orleans might keep him indefinitely; while the "most philosophical student" of Harvard could not help a slight feeling of annoyance at the general fuss that was being made about the return of a commonplace, good-natured young man because he happened to come in for some money.

It had once or twice occurred to the young heiress that since Edgar's arrival Miss Morton was a great deal improved in her personal appearance. She seemed in better spirits, and her attire, although extremely plain, was on the whole more carefully got up.

"Did you know her very intimately in the North?" asked the student's lady-love one afternoon, *apropos* of what Ole Miss had just been saying about the admirable manner in which her substitute fulfilled her multifarious duties.

"No; very slightly. She was a few days with some people, and occasionally visited when at college. I believe, though, that my father's wife used to be chums with her when they were children. She sings remarkably well."

"Ah! Are you still as fond of music as you used to be? Don't you recollect how you scolded poor little me for not culturing myself by cultivating sharps and flats on the piano?"

"Did I? Well, if I thought you less than perfect I must have been a donkey!" he answered, partly in earnest, partly in jest, but with a look in his gray eyes which made the girl's heart bound, and her cheeks blush as pink as summer roses.

CHAPTER XII.

ESTRANGEMENT.

"WELL, Peyton," said Mr. Baskerville, "you'll be here betimes to-morrow? We shall start about eight, I suppose."

"All right."

They were walking to the gate, where the young man's horse was waiting, held by a groom. It was nine o'clock of a deliciously mild moonshiny night, and down South moon-

light means the distant mountains, the forests, fields, and rivulets, the shingles on the roof—nay, the very snakes that happen to wriggle across the path—brilliantized into distinctness, as if by electricity. In the porch the two men had just quitted, Edgar and Cherry stood mutually silent, and shy, and nervous. Since the young cotton-broker's return a fortnight before, he had dropped naturally into his former intimacy with his old friends, and now as much an *enfant de famille* at Baskerville as before going to New Orleans. With his kindly, frank, "no-nonsense" ways, he was a general favorite, besides a gallant-looking gentleman. The great prosperity which had fallen to his lot, perhaps, made the universal pæans a little louder; but even if he had not possessed a copper to bless himself withal, his wavy, golden beard, merry blue eyes, and erect, stalwart figure would have found favor with most people, especially with the female sex. In fact, shortly before his return, a report had reached Virginia that he was engaged to the loveliest and wealthiest of the many lovely and wealthy young ladies for which New Orleans was at that period celebrated throughout the Southern States.

Gentle Mrs. Enderby, who was her son's chief correspondent, hastened to assure the Baskervilles that it was merely a *canard*, and that for her part she did not believe a word of the rumor.

"Why? Simply for the best of all reasons—that she didn't. My dear boy," she argued, "would at once have written to tell me if he had proposed to any one. From his earliest childhood he always was such an honest, outspoken little fellow."

Whether, however, the news was true or the reverse, the receipt of it gave Cherry what, in these parts, is called a turn.

To the collegian she was devotedly attached; but, alas! the same slightly egotistical craving for a monopoly of affection which drove her nearly frantic in prospect of her father's marriage, now made her feel aggrieved at the bare idea of little Mrs. P.'s old place in Peyton's heart being made over to another party.

Since the cotton-broker's return home, Edgar had gradually been growing more and more unhappy. Before that, he had looked hopefully, if vaguely, forward to the time when, as professor in a university, he should be in a position to ask Cherry to share his home and fame. Now, what did it signify that his host and hostess treated him like their own child, while what with hourly increasing love for the heiress, and a mortifying sense of his present poverty, it was sometimes all he could do to maintain that calm exterior, which was frequently mistaken for coldness and hauteur.

In his inmost soul he believed Cherry loved him; but a sense of justice and self-respect hindered him from putting it to the test. If he proposed, would not everybody set him down as a fortune-hunter; and would not even her father consider his suit simply a piece of presumption? Such reflections were making him become painfully sensitive, if not positively sore, upon certain points.

A true descendant of what Ole Miss called "those Mayflower people," he would any time, for the sake of what seemed *right*, have, so to speak, cut off his own hand without hesitation; and this very evening a certain fancied gushiness in Cherry's "Good-night" to young Enderby strengthened his resolution as they stood without speaking, looking toward the gate where Peyton was about to mount his horse.

"Holloa! who have we here?" exclaimed Mr. Baskerville, as his companion vaulted into the saddle.

"I declare if it isn't the Manderstones!" cried Peyton, turning around and seeing a "rookaway" and two "buggies" driving up in the moonlight, followed by three men on horseback, covered with long riding-cloaks, or, as they were usually named, "Talmas." "Of course it is them. There is Emmie Dickenson waving her hand to us. Don't you see her?"

Such laughing there was as the small procession drew up, and such hand-shaking, and hopes that the little "surprise party" would not be too much for dear Mrs. Baskerville.

"Not at all," said the planter. "She is keeping ever so much better of late, and will be very pleased indeed to see you. It's a good job you hadn't gone home, Peyton."

"It's such a glorious night we could not resist coming," said Tom Dickenson, as, some half-dozen niggers having taken charge of the carriages and horses, Mr. Baskerville and his self-invited guests walked to the house.

With a lump at his throat, Edgar went down the steps to say, "How do you do?" while Cherry, her eyes full of tears she would not permit to fall, carried away the girls to take off their wraps and hoods.

In a few minutes the piano was drawn to a corner of the dancing-room; lounges were wheeled close to the walls, and mats lifted; while the company was standing in pairs upon the polished floor, waiting to commence the favorite dance, "Over the Water to Charlie." But where was the musician?

"Miss Morton will perhaps be so kind as to play for us?" suggested Edgar, when it appeared that none of the girls was musical.

Ole Miss used generally on such occasions to be, as she said, the "principal fiddler" herself; but now, reclining on her lounge, enjoying the merry scene, she expressed her

pleasure at discovering yet another capability in her efficient substitute.

"Why, my dear," she asked, "why did you keep your light so long under a bushel, and never let us know how charmingly you play? Perhaps you also sing?"

"A little."

"I am so glad! It will be a great pleasure, I assure you, if you will give us a song now and then. I used to play a good deal in my young days, but Cherry never cared about hearing music. I fancy, dear child, she might have taken more to it if she had had a better teacher than myself."

To the negroes gazing delighted in at the windows and peeping through the open doors, the little surprise party appeared, no doubt, a brilliant display of unalloyed enjoyment; but whatever might be the sensations of the majority of the company, two of them at least were miserable.

When the cotton-broker, in his bright, take-it-for-granted manner, claimed Cherry's hand for the dance, it would have been ungracious to refuse; but when it turned out that, as there were only six ladies, one of the seven young men must needs be left partnerless, why should Edgar at once elect to be that individual, and marching straight to the piano, with a sudden feeling of ice up his back, stand sentry over Miss Morton?

Was it Cherry's fault that her cavalier, being in overflowing spirits, should, as, with his arm round her waist, they skimmed past Edgar, whisper "Little Mrs. P." in her pretty, shell-like ear; or how, consistent with maiden modesty, would a grown-up young lady tell him, "Dear old friend, don't you see that Edgar is vexed, and that you are breaking my heart?"

Ah, me! if conventional etiquette did not forbid the utterance of such "words in season," the set of human lives might sometimes be altered.

Out of consideration for Mrs. Baskerville's health, dancing was not kept up late; but before supper, Miss Morton, at Edgar's special request, sung "Oft in the Stilly Night" and "Home, Sweet Home."

Her voice was one of those rich contraltos which generally have a touch of pathos in them; and although Cherry was not supposed to possess musical proclivities, the refrain of "Home, Sweet Home," filled her lovely eyes with tears for the second time that night.

Possibly, the said lachrymal fountains were in any case not far from overflowing; for, alas! there could be no mistake about it, she had deceived herself with regard to Edgar, who was evidently very much delighted with Miss Morton and her music. If he had had any regard for herself, would he have left her

to dance time after time with Peyton, and purposely—she was sure it was purposely—avoided even looking in her direction?

Of course, the others fancied Peyton was paying her particular attention, and that she encouraged him. How could anybody think anything else? Oh, dear! what a sorrowful world this was!

The light-hearted guests seemed as if they never would go; but the moment of departure came at last.

While Edgar and her father went to the gate to see their friends off, Cherry, trembling and heart-sore, lingered in the now dark porch.

Ah! here comes the collegian walking slowly up the path, his head bowed as if in deep thought, his tall, stately figure giving him the air of a prince. The planter has remained behind to give some orders to his groom.

Supposing Cherry has retired for the night, and that the porch is empty, the young man stops at the uppermost step, and impulsively clasps his hands over his face.

"Good-night, Edgar, dear," says a tremulous voice out of the darkness.

It was, no doubt, utterly undignified in the circumstances to make use of such a significant adjective, but the word was not so much the utterance of the maiden's lips as of the longing soul, barriered off by its mortal tabernacle from the other spirit with which it would fain hold intercommunion.

"Good-night, Cherry," replied Edgar.

From the struggle to keep down his emotion, his voice sounded hard.

Never had he loved her so much as at this moment, when he had just made up his mind to leave her and Baskerville as soon as possible, and forever.

To himself that "Good-night, Cherry," had in it some of the tender solemnity of a death-bed adieu. As he promised years ago, in the bower, he would till death love her better than anybody else in the world, but it was not possible to shut his eyes to the manner in which young Enderby had acquitted himself as a favored suitor, if not actually an accepted lover.

"God bless her all the same!" was his fervent aspiration, while Cherry, sorely hurt at his coldness, glided into the house.

"Alas! how easily things go wrong,
A word too much or a kiss too long.
Then there cometh a mist, and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERY REVEALED.

"Oh, Lor'! Miss Possi!" whispered 'Nerva, in such terror, that nothing but its incapability of uncrisping hindered the wool on her head from standing right on end.

It was half-past two in the morning. The

old owl in the front yard, and a young owlet, were interchanging hideous shrieks. Mammy Eunice had always occupied a truckle-bed in a sort of recess at her young lady's door; but being troubled just then with a noisy cough, it had that very evening been arranged that, for a night or two, the junior *femme de chambre* should take her place.

"No, it is no use trying to sleep," said Cherry to herself, after tossing on the pillow for two hours in wakeful wretchedness. "It's no good; I cannot close an eye! Oh, how miserable I am! I see it all quite plain!—Edgar was a little bit in love with her at Harvard; and when they met here and saw more of each other, that settled the business. The way she blushed when I mentioned his name is now accounted for. I should not wonder if it was on her account he offered to visit us. I wish I could sing as well as she. I recollect, when he first came, he mentioned her fine voice. Nobody can call her pretty; only there's no accounting for taste! Oh, dear! oh, dear! How happy we were before she came! It was the most delicious fortnight I ever spent in my life; but little did I guess how soon he would break my heart!"

She had thrown on the white dressing-gown, and like a restless spirit moved noiselessly up and down the room, where darkness was made dimly visible by a night-light placed on the hearth.

"Good Lor'! Miss Possi! Oh, oh, oh!"

Starting suddenly awake from a terrifying dream of her former mistress, she mistook Cherry's white-robed figure for the poisoned woman's spirit come to carry her away.

"Hush!" said Miss Baskerville, stepping over to the pallet, and afraid of any sound that might disturb her grandmother's rest.

"Please—please, Miss Possi!" whined the negress, quite beside herself with fear. "I 'fess now I've done—done it! Oh, please not carry me off! Oh, oh, oh!"

She fell back on the bed, with a sort of gurgle in her throat, staring wildly, but evidently seeing only the ghost of her own fancy. Cherry flew to shut the door, dashed a jug of water in the girl's face, held the night-light up to show her own countenance, and begged to know what all this "to do" was about.

Then Minerva, beaming all over with delight that it was not her mistress after all, sat up and "'fessed" how she had done Miss Cherry's step-mother to death, as well as the baby-heir of Baskerville. Having thus made a clean breast of it, and being relieved from the fear of being spirited away, and perhaps made a spook of herself, the nigger dismissed the whole affair from her mind. But the disclosure she had made placed the heiress in a painful state of perplexity,

For the first time she had to judge not only for herself, but those who were wiser, and in one sense more capable of deciding.

Was it right to conceal the crime this ignorant slave had committed? And yet, where would be the use of bruiting it abroad? To punish 'Nerva would neither restore Miss Possi to life nor bring back the hapless infant whose death had made such a difference in her own position. On account of her threatened blindness, it was of consequence to keep up the old lady's spirits as much as possible, so to tell the painful story to her would simply be cruel; while to rake up bygones for Mr. Baskerville's behoof could have no other effect than to make him wretched. If all this had only happened during that first blissful fortnight of Edgar's visit, what a comfort it would have been to ask his advice, and be guided implicitly by his counsel; but now—

It was the first secret Cherry had ever possessed, and the horrid nature of it made her feel as if it would henceforth keep weighing her soul down like lead, as if never any more should she be able to raise it.

Then groping about—so to speak—in her spirit-darkness for some one whose experience of similar distress might take off the sense of utter loneliness, it struck her as just possible that the exceeding reserve which she objected to in Miss Morton might be occasioned by the unshared burden of some appalling secret. If so, she could now sincerely pity her, in spite of Edgar's preference.

The sable ex-murderess was meanwhile snoring like a giant performing upon a trombone, but her young mistress sat till dawn in uneasy meditation.

Then Mammy Eunice entering, refreshed by a good night's rest, upbraided "dat lazy, lie-abed nigger slut" for not getting up earlier; and the heiress, while being "fixed up" for breakfast, felt as if long years had passed over her head since yesterday.

As the collegian had also refrained from seeking his couch, and had passed the hours in devising feasible excuses for cutting short his visit, it was not to be wondered at that both the young people looked pale and heavy-eyed when Uncle Jupiter's bell summoned them to breakfast.

The planter was at no time a very notice-taking individual, but had Ole Miss been able to see as well as she used to do, she would certainly have been struck with the sudden flush which overspread their faces as they exchanged rather stiff good-mornings.

The sort of glow which had lighted up Miss Morton's face the previous night while she was singing had vanished and she was again the self-contained, industrious housekeeper.

The planter was in jubilant spirits, and cer-

tainly looked very handsome as he chatted cheerfully during the meal. He and young Enderby were about to start for Farmville, where he had some banking business to transact, and afterward they were going as far as Marble Hill, to remain till next day with a cousin of Peyton's.

"It is going to be splendid weather for our journey," said Mr. Baskerville, as he helped himself to some curried vegetables; "and, Edgar, my dear boy, since you will not be persuaded to accompany us, let me advise you and Cherry to take a canter along your old favorite, the Chickahominy Road. I don't think either of you have been riding the last few days. Why is that, little woman, when there's Zephyr kicking her hoofs to pieces in the stable for sheer idleness?—and as you know, Edgar, Jubal is entirely at your disposal. How time does fly, to be sure! It seems like yesterday since you two children went scampering like mad things in all directions; and now you are as stately and polished as the most elegant of our old-time presidents and presidentesses, eh? Ah! here comes my fellow-traveler!" he continued, as Peyton appeared at the gate on a magnificent chestnut mare, with her tail flowing down to the fetlocks, and a spray of wild indigo in her headstall to keep off the flies.

Hitching his bridle to a post, the cotton-broker advanced, cap in hand, and by the easy affability of his manners made the few minutes he remained quite a bright little interlude. Presently, Mr. Baskerville's horse was brought round—long-maned and tailed, and, like his friend's mare, provided with huge carved wooden stirrups and roomy saddle-bags, containing the rider's kit.

"Now, my boy," said his host, kindly, to Edgar, as they walked with the others to the gate, "don't forget that till I come back you are master here; so see that my reputation for hospitality doesn't suffer in your hands, and take great care of the ladies."

The day passed on leaden feet.

"Are you and Edgar not going out for a ride, Cherry?" asked her grandmother. "It is a pity to miss such a fine evening."

"No, gran'ma; I do not seem to care for riding to-day."

"Are you quite well, my pet?"

"Quite, dear grannie, thanks."

Edgar was supposed to be writing letters in his own room, and at dinner looked so careworn that Miss Morton supposed he had received bad news by the mail, but attributed Cherry's depression to Mr. Enderby's absence.

The evening was lovely, but not warm enough to permit the invalid to remain in the

porch; so when she adjourned to the drawing-room the others did so too.

"Will you favor us with a song, Miss Morton?" she asked.

"With pleasure," was the answer, as, laying aside her knitting, the housekeeper opened the piano.

Her rendering of "The Last Rose of Summer" was, if possible, more touching than on the previous night. It brought a lump to Cherry's throat, and made her heart beat doubly quick.

Passionately fond of music as Edgar was, the sweet, grave melody seemed to rest his fretted spirit after the day's struggle with painful thoughts.

"Thank you so very much!" he said, as the songstress rose from the instrument, where he had been standing beside her.

"Thank you, my dear!" said Mrs. Baskerville. "It is indeed a treat to hear such a voice as yours!"

The old lady went on chatting pleasantly; and her granddaughter, watching her opportunity, slipped out unobserved to the bower in the garden.

She could stand it no longer, and felt the absolute necessity of taking what ladies term "a good cry."

Between the haunting knowledge of Miss Possi's murder and the sight of Edgar's visible devotion to Miss Morton and her music, there really seemed to be nothing for it but, in pugilistic phrase, to throw up the sponge.

Thanks to the general dread of Miss Possi's spook, none of the niggers were likely to intrude into the garden even on a pilfering expedition; so within the leafy shade of the bower the distressed heiress lifted up her voice, and wept without let or hindrance.

Young Dennison's feelings having, meanwhile, become too much for him also, he likewise hied to the quietest spot he could think of to compose his mind for facing his fate like a man.

"Cherry!"

"Edgar!"

If the two young people's nerves had not been strung up to an abnormally high pitch, they would not, it is to be presumed, have rushed so soon into one another's arms; but in supreme moments people occasionally perform actions of which, in cold blood, they would no more be capable than of flying. One can easily picture the reconciliation.

"Miss Morton! My dearest, darling little girl! as if I ever did, or could, or shall love any one but your sweet self!"

"Peyton! Oh, Edgar! how could you for a moment imagine I cared for him, when I have adored you for years and years, and nearly

wept my eyes out because I did not think you cared for me?"

Had nature provided such an institution as the gloaming in that part of the world, now would have been the time for the lovers, not only to "kootoo," but talk a little of their future.

But in the sunny South there is no twilight. The moon would not rise till later, and *en attendant* the darkness fell, while Uncle Jupiter commenced ringing the supper-bell as if he meant it to be attended to.

Neither letter or message having come, Miss Morton was surprised at the sudden clearing off of the young people's dismals.

Not even a carrier-pigeon had arrived, so Cherry could not possibly have had any communication from her absent lover; while, for the same reason, no news could have come to remove whatever was the cause of Mr. Dennison's low spirits.

To the youthful couple themselves all was *couleur de rose*. They seemed to be floating in ether. Oh, the delight of loving and being loved! The present was enough.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DREADFUL BLOW.

"WHAT a lovely world this is, and such a happy girl I am!" said Cherry to herself next morning as she threw open the shutters of her chamber. "Such a charming day we shall have, dear, dear, dearest Edgar and I, all by ourselves, before papa and Peyton return! There is so much I want to tell him, the darling fellow!"

The young man's sensations and hopes being somewhat similar, it was with anything but pleasure he found himself obliged to act as host to a family party of five, who had come eleven miles to spend a long day.

Being relations of Ole Miss, they made themselves thoroughly at home—that is to say, Mrs. Kenyon kept the invalid company, while her own merry daughters monopolized Cousin Cherry, not forgetting also to do what in them lay to captivate the handsome Yankee.

Cherry could have wept. This day of all days, why had they come, as if on purpose to prevent her and Edgar being together?

It was really too tantalizing!

"I'll tell you what, Cousin Cherry," said Miss Betty Kenyon, "Mr. Dennison is awfully nice, and cultured, and smart; but it will never do to marry a Northerner, especially just now, when papa says we are going to war with them!"

"Stuff!"

"Fact, though. Papa was at Charleston last week, and he insists that the South will

not stand the way she is being insulted much longer."

Mrs. Kenyon, an anecdotal, chirpy sort of woman, had kept Ole Miss so amused for some hours that when the visitors' carriage was announced, she sincerely expressed her regret for the shortness of their very pleasant visit.

The sight of the big yellow chariot at the gate made Edgar and Cherry, on the contrary, feel inclined to shout "Hurrah!" But, alas! who can see even through the space of a single hour?

Before the Kenyons were fairly under way, the planter and Peyton arrived, and in less than forty minutes afterward the collegian was on his road to Harvard.

On their way back from Marble Hill, Mr. Baskerville and his companion had called at the Farmville post-office, and thus twenty-four hours earlier than in the ordinary course Edgar received a letter urging his immediate return, to compete for a capital college appointment which had unexpectedly become vacant.

By starting at once for Farmville, he would be in time to catch the night mail train for the North; but it was all so sudden, that he felt more dreaming than awake.

Had Peyton made himself less ubiquitously serviceable in helping pack up, the lovers might have had a better chance of a few minutes' private conversation.

As it was, the cotton-broker was in sight, and almost within earshot, when Edgar said in a low voice that thrilled with intense earnestness, "My darling, I do not know in the least how much or how little this berth is worth, but if I obtain it will you marry me?"

"Yes."

Next minute Edgar was off on his journey.

One of the mysterious things about Miss Morton was that she had not received a single letter since being at Baskerville, but on the very morning after Edgar's departure one came.

Cherry happened to see it lying on the table, and noticed that it bore the New York postmark.

Some quarter of an hour subsequently, when the girl was reading aloud to her grandmother, Miss Morton entered, very pale, and her eyes red and swollen as if she had been crying.

"I am very sorry, indeed, Mrs. Baskerville, to put you to inconvenience, but I must leave to-day. You have been very kind, and I would spare you this trouble if I could, but there is no help for it. I absolutely must go without delay."

Asking explanations was of no use. She either would not give any or could not.

Fortunately Ole Miss had been feeling a

good deal better the last day or two, and she now rose bravely to the emergency.

"I really think, Frank," she said, "that till we get suited, Cherry and Mammy might, under my direction, do all that is required. In the mean time you can't do better than ride over to Oak Grove and ask dear Mrs. Enderby's advice."

"Oh, my dear friend," was Mrs. Enderby's salutation when the planter arrived, "isn't this dreadful? A man has just been sent from Madingly to tell us that poor dear Harry has been badly bitten by a moccasin, and—and is perhaps—perhaps already no more! Oh, my poor boy! We are all going directly. The horses are put into the carriage, and—"

Mr. Baskerville's sympathy was deep and unfeigned. Harry being the elder son, a very superior young man, recently married, and the same who had officiated as his own groom'sman in lieu of Doctor Dennison.

"We were just going to call for a moment in passing," said Peyton, coming in with a sorrowful look in his usually joyous countenance.

The absence of their ever-helpful neighbors made Miss Morton's departure appear even more selfish than before; but what must be must be, and by five P. M. she had said farewell, pocketed her wages, and was *en route* to the railway depot in a top-buggy, her late employers feeling meanwhile in the position of shipwrecked sailors.

In the present annoying predicament her father and grandmother were greatly astonished at the way in which Cherry put her shoulder to the wheel.

At the end of three weeks Mr. and Mrs. Enderby came home. Their elder son had had a run for his life, but was now convalescent. Peyton, however, had taken a congested chill, and although not in danger, was still too ill to travel. A successor to Miss Morton was by this time installed as housekeeper—an active, honest woman, the widow of a white overseer, but not a lady.

As Edgar had never written, Cherry was nearly falling ill with anxiety.

"Very strange of that boy not to drop a line," said her father, once or twice. "Whether or not he got the post at Harvard, he might have been certain we should feel interested."

"I hope he is not ill again, dear boy," said Ole Miss.

Cherry almost fainted at the idea.

One day there came a note from Doctor Dennison.

"Just a line, dear old friend, to say Edgar has been elected to the situation. I have been very anxious, but now it is all right. I need not go into

particulars, as I dare say he has written them himself, as well as about the wedding, which comes off to-morrow. I am obliged to go out to attend a patient."

Nothing had been heard of Miss Morton since Sam let her out of massa's buggy three weeks ago, at the railway depot.

Cherry scarcely ate or slept, and was looking so ill that her father called in Doctor Randolph.

Next afternoon, the negro who carried the Baskerville letters to and from the post-office brought a newspaper for the planter, and a small packet addressed, "Mr. and Mrs. Baskerville."

Cherry's heart beat with ominous dread as she unfolded the dainty glazed white wrapper which covered wedding-cards and a tiny slice of cake.

The cards were tied with silver cord, and inscribed, "Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Dennison."

"Well, he might have told us, I think!" said Ole Miss. "Look at the newspaper, dear; I dare say it is mentioned there. Who can it be he has married? But, of course, he will now be in a position to maintain a wife."

Yes; there it was:

"At St. — Church, New York, Edgar Dennison, Esq., to Barbara, daughter of the late John Morton."

It would be folly to try to portray Cherry's feelings.

When Peyton arrived, he was still rather thin after his illness; but his genial presence was always as pleasant as flowers in May. But for his sickness he would have weeks ago proposed to Cherry. Yet, now that he was about to do so, the possibility of being refused gave a new air of gentle thoughtfulness to his manner which insensibly soothed the girl's forcibly repressed sentiment.

A few days after his return they were formally engaged.

From even passing recollections of Edgar she recoiled with horror as temptations of the Evil One.

Think with tender regret of another woman's husband? Heaven forbid! But the inward struggle to forget was incessant and exhausting.

Peyton was such a dear, good fellow, and so grateful for having won her, that she felt sure she should by-and-by be quite happy.

The betrothal gave unmixed satisfaction to both families, besides the folks in the back yard, who highly approved of the connection.

The wedding was not to come off for four or five weeks. Peyton had so far exceeded the originally-fixed limits of his stay in Virginia, that for business reasons it was now necessary he should at once proceed to New Orleans, returning thence to claim his bride.

Meanwhile he loaded her with magnificent gifts. The wives of several of the worthy planters could boast of very tolerable jewels; but nothing in that quarter of the Old Dominion had ever been seen to compare with the "baby Koh-i-noor" which formed the central stone of Miss Baskerville's engagement ring.

Exactly one week after their betrothal, the stock-broker tore himself away from his beautiful *fiancee* and returned to New Orleans.

It had been the happiest period of his existence, and his heart swelled with gratitude to Heaven as he thought of the future, spent by the side of the beloved one.

Cherry's behavior left nothing to be desired, and the sorrow she expressed at his departure was perfectly sincere, for it was painfully borne in upon her that, separated from him, Edgar's image would again steal into the heart whence it had with so much difficulty been excluded. With the laudable intention, therefore, of, so to speak, fortifying the castle against assault by announcing to the enemy that the lord thereof was in possession, she took the rather curious step of writing to inform young Dennison of her approaching marriage.

It was done upon the impulse of the moment, and could scarcely be called a letter, being merely a statement of the above fact, without even a conventional line, "Please remember me," to his wife.

It was dashed off hurriedly, and mailed within a few hours of her *fiancee's* departure. But no sooner was this done than she began to wish it had been otherwise. So far from keeping out Edgar's image from her mind, she found herself thinking of him continually.

Oh, if she had anybody to tell her distress to!

The cotton-broker was a delightful correspondent, but his cheerful, loving letters made Cherry feel criminal.

"Listen to me, dearest grannie," she at last exclaimed, with a burst of tears, as she threw herself on her knees before the amazed old lady; "you don't know how wicked I am! I do not in the least care for poor Peyton as one should do to marry him, and I keep thinking about Edgar till my heart feels breaking, and I seem to be going mad!"

"My dear child!" gasped Ole Miss, in consternation, struck with a sudden conviction that her grandchild was insane, and that a strait-jacket, and not tincture of steel, would be Doctor Randolph's next prescription.

"My darling child, what do you mean? Frank, please come here—Frank!" she cried, as the planter was heard passing along the passage.

"Yes, yes, grandma—let papa come! I

must confess my guilt, or I shall go mad! Oh, how you will both hate me when you know all!"

It is a week since the day upon which Peyton was to have stood with his lovely bride at the altar, but, albeit when the match was broken off, "After that, the deluge!" was the universal cry, nobody is drowned.

Of course, it was a great calamity all round, and the hapless cause of it had a serious illness, from which she did not care about recovering. Her letter to the forsaken bridegroom was heartrending in its purity and simplicity, and made him doubly feel how great was the treasure he had lost.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RAVAGES OF WAR.

THE terrible four years' War of Secession, which broke out shortly after the rupture of Cherry Baskerville's engagement, had been brought to a close two years ago by the surrender of General Lee.

Baskerville still stands where it stood before; but, ah! how changed! A battle took place close by, and although the house still remains, it is a shattered wreck, while all around is a scene of desolation.

Mr. Baskerville did gallantly, sword in hand, near his own door; and the Enderbys, father and elder son, fell at Gettysburg.

Like many of their class, these brave gentlemen fought not so much for the sake of upholding slavery as from patriotism.

They loved their native land; gloried in it as the "Old Dominion"—the "Mother of Presidents," and did not see the necessity of holding on to the Union which, originally a voluntary association, had in their opinion ceased to be satisfactory.

Peyton had taken part in the defense of Fort Sumter, but was again in business, and married. His mother resided under his roof.

Oak Grove House was occupied by Mr. Baskerville's former overseer, Ullathorne, who, having secured some money, had, in these topsy-turvy times, set up as a farmer.

Grinding poverty was, generally speaking, the portion of the upper class. Taxed exorbitantly for lands they could neither get rid of nor cultivate, the very extent of an estate was its owner's ruin.

Some of the old-time family servants conducted themselves wonderfully well, and stuck to their former owners, where these could afford to keep them; but the bulk of the colored population were scattered in all directions, begging, starving, and stealing.

Cherry and her blind grandmother still dwelt in the old family-house—such as it

was—with one small nigger boy as their only servant.

Mammy Eunice had died peacefully about six months before, affectionately waited upon by her beloved mistresses.

Cherry had proved herself a heroine of the noblest type.

Devoted to her blind grandmother, there was nothing she would not turn her hand to, to render her comfortable.

She raised chickens and vegetables for selling to those of the liberated slaves who, having the sense to work, could afford to buy them, and she made gowns and knitted stockings, at a cheap rate, for persons who half a dozen years ago would not have presumed to take a seat in her presence.

Of course she did not relish this any more than the aristocratic patriarch of Uz, in his low estate, liked the company of the individuals whom once on a time he "would not have set with the dogs of his flock," but with the impoverished proprietress of Baskerville, duty was ever the first consideration.

One thing she had set her heart upon—viz.: to make sufficient money to carry gentle, patient Ole Miss to Philadelphia to consult a famous oculist.

At first it seemed utterly impossible she could ever accumulate the requisite sum; but patience and perseverance work wonders.

The cash was now safe in her purse, and on the morrow her helpless charge and self would be *en route*, traveling, not in a luxurious, satin-lined, silver-mounted chariot, such as had been wantonly burned before her eyes by some blue-coated troopers, whom Mammy Eunice vociferously denounced as "low, mean, thieving Nor'fen scum," but in a disreputable-looking buggy, drawn by an ancient brown mule, with white fore-legs, and blind of an eye.

But what did that signify? What, indeed, did anything signify, if only gentle, patient grannie's sight was restored, and she could once more behold her beloved Blue Ridge mountains.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BEGINNING OF A NEW LIFE.

A CHEERLESS, rainy afternoon, about three o'clock.

In an ugly, circular, draughty railway waiting-room Cherry and her helpless charge sit expecting the arrival of the train from Philadelphia.

Their dress is not much to boast of; but of a certain "air noble" nothing can deprive them. The old lady wears a carefully-preserved black silk mantle and hood, which by good luck had escaped being confiscated at the sacking of Baskerville House.

If Cherry is infinitely lovelier than in the

old days, it is no thanks to her attire—a gown of ordinary dark-blue Virginia cloth, with straw hat and dust-colored *barege* veil.

Crowds of people are bustling in and out of the waiting-room, dashing open the swing-doors and shutting them, till the cross-draughts are enough to give delicate persons their deaths.

Owing to the shape of the room, there are no snug corners to retire to for refuge from the currents of air.

Afraid that her grandmother may catch cold, Cherry opens an umbrella, and holds it betwixt her and a door, which is no sooner shut than it is again flung open, and *vice versa*.

Suddenly Cherry beheld three people resting themselves within a few yards of where she was—a tall gentleman in a great-coat, an elegantly-attired lady, and a small boy in a purple velvet suit.

It was only for an instant she saw their faces as the lady, unfurling a crimson silk sunshade, held it so as to shelter her companions from the shifting draught.

One glance, however, was enough to enable her to recognize Edgar Dennison, his wife, and, no doubt, their child.

The years that had brought so much sorrow to her had evidently dealt well by her old acquaintances, for Edgar, instead of a handsome youth, had grown a noble-looking man; and as for the *ci-devant* Miss Morton, she was quite pretty, and appeared younger than when she quitted Baskerville.

"Is this our train dear?" said Mrs. Baskerville, hearing a commotion.

"I think so, gran'ma," faltered Cherry, feeling all at once cold and blind, and faint, and letting her umbrella drop.

In her anxiety about the old lady's comfort, she had overtaxed her strength and now collapsed in consequence.

Recovering from a long swoon, she found herself laid on one of the leathern benches, while Edgar, on his knees, held smelling-salts to her nostrils, and his wife applied eau-de-Cologne to her pale brow.

A chair had been fetched for the blind lady, who wept softly, holding her granddaughter's hand in both of hers.

Save for this small company, the waiting-room was empty, the up-train, as well as the lower one, having duly arrived and departed.

9 P. M.

A cheerful sitting-room in the Lincoln Hotel, *vis-a-vis* the railway depot, Mrs. Dennison presiding at a daintily-spread suppertable, and smiling as, with a warning shake

of her head, she helps her little son to his favorite *plat* of canned peaches and cream.

She wears a delicate pink cashmere dress, trimmed with fine lace, and a fresh rose in her hair. Facing her, at the other end of the table, is a tall, broad-shouldered man of between forty and fifty, rough as to features, and with a weather-beaten complexion, but possessed of a pair of fine dark eyes and remarkably good expression of countenance. Cherry, Mrs. Baskerville, and Edgar make up the party, every member of which looks happier than another.

While they enjoy their evening meal, which, judging by the *menu* is sufficiently appetizing, let me elucidate the mystery of Barbara Morton, and also clear the *ci-devant* collegian from the imputation of treachery.

Miss Morton's father, while not unkind in his domestic capacity, had proved one of the greatest rogues ever heard of in Chicago, and swindled right and left on such a gigantic scale that at last, to save him from the vengeance of certain of his victims, his sudden death was announced, and, with the connivance of his daughter and dying wife, he escaped, while a log was buried in his coffin.

After closing her beloved mother's eyes, Barbara disappeared from the scene of her father's ruthless villainies, and when she came to Baskerville had never heard whether he was dead or alive, or what had become of him.

Besides this another grief preyed on her mind. One of the chief sufferers by her father's scoundrelism was a Mr. Edgar Dennison, who had, in fact, been nearly ruined.

He was in Mexico at the time of the bankruptcy, but for some time before it had been currently reported in Chicago that a marriage was on the *tapis* between him and Morton, the millionaire's only daughter.

Although he was a good deal older than herself, the girl loved him with all her heart. And at Baskerville the thought of how he must detest the very name of Morton cost her many a sleepless night.

Being a cousin of Doctor Dennison, he bore the same name as the collegian, and hence Barbara's nervous blush when it was mentioned by Cherry.

The letter which made her depart in such hot haste, and decline saying whither she was bound, was from her father, imploring her to come without delay to the hospital in New York, where, under a feigned name, he lay dying, and of which Doctor Dennison was the senior physician.

It was through him he discovered Barbara's address, and after his death the doctor was also the means of letting his cousin know where Miss Morton was.

It was a case of true love on both sides, and in the circumstances, as the wedding would be a very quiet one, there was no use in putting it off.

Edgar, junior, had written all about it to Cherry, and also that, having obtained the expected post at Harvard, he should at the earliest possible moment, fly to Baskerville to ask her father to sanction their implied engagement.

After waiting impatiently for a reply, he wrote again, with no better result, and was on the point of asking leave of absence to proceed South personally, when Cherry's letter was put into his hands, announcing her approaching marriage with Peyton Enderby.

It was discovered long afterward that several letters had been lost about that time through the dishonesty of one of the post-office officials, who destroyed those in which he failed to find the expected inclosures.

By one of those strange coincidences, however, which occur occasionally, he was sick and off duty the day Barbara's wedding-cards and the newspaper to Mr. Baskerville were mailed, and accordingly they arrived in safety.

When Cherry and her grandmother encountered them so unexpectedly, Barbara and her husband were on their road home to Florida, where he had an extensive orange-farm, and whither Professor Edgar Dennison was also going for a short visit.

Meeting with his early love, however, changed his plan, and instead of proceeding to the beautiful region of flowers, he accompanied his *fiancee* and her grandmother to Philadelphia, where the great German oculists operated on the old lady's eyes successfully, and she had the supreme delight once more of not only beholding her grandchild, but also the admired and learned Professor, who would shortly call her grandmother.

As Edgar's avocation lies in a Northern university, his wife and dear Ole Miss are happy there for his dear sake, but Ole Virginny is not forgotten.

Instead of letting Baskerville go to the dogs, they have had the house repaired, and spend part of every year there.

The Professor, moreover, being a bit of a philanthropist, spends a good deal of his spare cash in trying to elevate the negroes in the locality.

It is uphill work, and some people compare him to Sisyphus. But what he says is very true—"Every little helps; and bath not Nature made of one blood all the families of the earth?"

Ole Miss worships the Professor, his wife adores him, and his half-dozen little brothers and sisters declare their big brother is worth all the big brothers of all the other boys and girls in New York.

THE END.

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